PICO DELLA MIRANDOLA

Oration on the Dignity of Man

A NEW TRANSLATION AND COMMENTARY

Edited by

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Pico della Mirandola *Oration on the Dignity of Man*

This is a new translation of and commentary on Pico della Mirandola's most famous work, the *Oration on the Dignity of Man*. It is the first English edition to provide readers with substantial notes on the text; essays that address the work's historical, philosophical, and theological contexts; and a survey of its reception. Often called the "Manifesto of the Renaissance," this brief but complex text was originally composed in 1486 as the inaugural speech for an assembly of intellectuals that could have produced one of the most exhaustive metaphysical, theological, and psychological debates in history had Pope Innocent VIII not forbidden it. This edition of the *Oration* reflects the spirit of the original text in bringing together experts in different fields. Not unlike the debate Pico optimistically anticipated, the resulting work is superior to the sum of its parts.

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Pico della Mirandola

*Oration on the Dignity of Man*A New Translation and Commentary

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Part I Preface, Introductions, Overview

Preface: History of the Pico Project and Criteria for the Current Edition

Massimo Riva

This edition of Giovanni Pico della Mirandola's discourse known as *Oratio de hominis dignitate* (On Human Dignity) is the product of teamwork performed by several scholars who participated in the Brown University–University of Bologna Pico Project. The project began in 1997 as an experiment in collaborative scholarship born out of a seminar on Pico given by Pier Cesare Bori, then a visiting professor at Brown. Bori was particularly interested in Pico's thought within the framework of his own reflection on human rights and the "pluralistic" convergence and potential consensus among diverse religious and ethical traditions. As a direct result of Bori's seminar, it became clear that a new edition of the *Oration* was desirable and that the new medium of electronic publishing could provide an interesting testing ground for our collaborative effort.

The original team who contributed to this first stage of the project included a group of scholars of differing backgrounds and disciplinary orientations, working in both Europe and North America.[1] The Web site of the Pico Project provided a shared platform for their work. We began by reproducing in digital form the text of the *Oration* from the *incunabula* of the *editio princeps* (edited by Pico's nephew, Gianfrancesco, and published in Bologna by Benedetto Faelli in 1496) held at the Biblioteca Universitaria in Bologna, at the Biblioteca Comunale dell'Archiginnasio in Bologna, and at the John Hay Library at Brown, knowing that the latter two *incunabula* are counterfeits of the *princeps*, both made in Lyon in 1498. We then proceeded to transcribe the text from the Biblioteca Universitaria copy of the *princeps*.

A further necessary step was the examination of an anonymous partial manuscript by an unidentified author, possibly Giovanni Nesi,[2] held at the National Library in Florence (misc. Palatino 885, discovered by Eugenio Garin) and generally held to represent the first draft of the *Oration* (an image of the manuscript is also available on our Web site). After this preliminary phase was completed, we were ready for the collaborative work envisioned as the core of our Brown–Bologna Pico Project.

Over the following years, the transcription of the text was augmented with footnotes and annotations; new translations into Italian, English, and Spanish were completed; and some auxiliary documents were added to the site, such as a presentation of the project (in Italian, English, and Latin), a chronology of Pico's life, a bibliography of his works, a guide and templates for potential collaborators (composed by Michael Papio), and an essay by Pier Cesare Bori outlining his interpretation of Pico, which was later expanded into a book published in Italy by Feltrinelli in 2000 (*Pluralità delle vie. Alle origini del Discorso sulla dignità umana di Pico della Mirandola – Plurality of Paths. The origins of the Discourse about Human Dignity of Pico della Mirandola*). This book, a portion of which is excerpted here, included the Latin text of the *Oration* as an appendix, accompanied by the Italian translation, the result of the collaborative work done on our site and edited by Saverio Marchignoli. Marchignoli's notes (also partially based on the work of our team) included the variants from both the manuscript fragment (contained in the misc. Palatino 885) and Pico's *Apologia* (*Apology*), published in Naples by Francesco Del Tuppo in 1487, and a synopsis of the parallel sections of the manuscript and the *princeps*.

This "hybrid" publishing method, relying on the electronic medium for the preparatory materials, remains one of the essential features of this expanded English edition. Compared with Marchignoli's Italian edition, the text of the *Oration* is accompanied here by an extensive apparatus of philological and interpretive footnotes and annotations. These identify sources previously unidentified, suggest intertextual links to other works by Pico or by other authors, and take into account, as much as possible, previous editions (mostly Italian or English). This includes, most

importantly, the most recent Italian edition by Francesco Bausi, published in 2003, to which our Latin text conforms. What appears here in print is thus the product of a collaborative effort whose results-in-progress were first presented online. Meanwhile, the Web site of the Pico Project (now part of the Virtual Humanities Lab at Brown and including an annotated edition-in-progress of Pico's *Conclusiones Nongentae*)[3] will continue to be updated and augmented, providing readers of this book with access to even more extensive resources that cannot easily be printed, such as a complete set of images from the manuscript and *incunabula*, as well as additional extensive quotations from Pico's texts and other identifiable or conjectural sources, quoted in their original languages (Greek, Hebrew, or Latin).[4]

This "hybrid" publication method represents a new and recent phase in the history of scholarly editions. It is quite common nowadays to complete preparatory work in electronic form for eventual publication in print, allowing scholars who collaborate all the communicative possibilities offered by email and the Internet, and the genesis of this edition as an online resource is thus reflected not only in the general spirit that informs it but also in some of its specific features. One could even suggest a historical analogy between Pico's time, when the transition from manuscript to the print medium was taking place, and our time, five hundred years later, when a new transition from print to the electronic medium is under way that allows new methods of testing and disseminating ideas. Such an analogy could indeed provide an opportunity for a reflection on the role of technology in the making (and remaking) of textual traditions; this, however, is outside the scope of this preface.

As far as the Pico Project is concerned, since the beginning our intention has been to make the *Oration* widely available on the Internet as a resource for a wider community of scholars and readers, an essential step toward a better understanding and reappraisal of a legendary episode of the Renaissance: Pico's project to defend his nine hundred theses or conclusions before a council of theologians, designated by Pope Innocent VIII and charged with confronting him in a debate open to philosophers and publicly advertised and "broadcast" through the new medium of print (the *incunabula* containing the *Conclusiones*, now lost with the exception of two

extant copies, one at the Vatican Library and the other at the British Library).[5] Pico's partially aborted effort at publishing and defending his theses is thus the symbol of an almost "heroic" humanistic enterprise, one which still resonates with us in these times of ideological and religious conflict: the (re)discovery of, and fostering of, an open dialogue among the most ancient religious and philosophical doctrines, widely perceived as antagonistic but instead embraced by the young Pico, in an extraordinary effort at reconciling different paths toward a common (human and divine) truth, according to his idea of philosophical concordance and peace.

From this point of view, Pico's system of thought and his method of quoting and editing his sources, by connecting and "linking" them in short, synthetic aphorisms, may also resonate with us, inspiring a comparison between Pico's "concordistic" way of synthesizing diverse traditions and ideas and our own post-modern way of retrieving and reconstructing them, both philologically and theoretically, from the depths of the historical archive.

As a true product of teamwork, a collective enterprise, and not the work of a single scholar, as is usually the case, this edition of the *Oration* also reflects the new collaborative paradigm emerging alongside the introduction of new technologies that not only make possible but actually impose new habits and methodologies of collaboration on scholars in the humanities, who have traditionally been more reticent in adopting them than their colleagues in the sciences. Some specific features of this edition can be considered a direct or, at the very least, an indirect result of this new approach, and it is worth outlining them here. For instance, the division of the text into six sections, each edited, translated, annotated, and introduced by one of the original team members and then revised by others, provides a multi-faceted perspective on the *Oration*, reflecting the points of view of the various editors with their specific backgrounds and interests (theology and philosophy, cultural history, philology and literature).[6] Moreover, the further subdivision of each section into numbered paragraphs and subparagraphs corresponding to each separate sentence in the *princeps*, maintained here in print, can be traced back to a suggestion by Pier Cesare Bori at the very beginning of the project and was meant to facilitate the

close reading process and the collaborative commentary that the scholars participating in the project were about to tackle.

Such an analytical subdivision of Pico's text, while perhaps arbitrary from a strictly philological point of view, also provides a useful layout in print for a fine parsing of a text which, although conceived by its author as a unified discourse to be pronounced in public (an introduction meant to set the tone of the debate about his nine hundred conclusions or theses), has also produced over the centuries a large archive of interpretations while maintaining its integrity as a philosophical text in its own merit, read by many as a veritable "manifesto" of Renaissance thought. Readers of this edition will have access to both the original discourse in Latin and its new English rendition, as well as the detailed commentary produced by the small community of scholars participating in the Pico Project.

In short, a trace of the specific interface of the online edition can be found in this editorial choice. This methodology is bound to evolve even further: in the second phase of the Pico Project, a more interactive, dynamic interface (part of the Virtual Humanities Lab) will allow a broader group of collaborating scholars to expand their annotations and translations to Pico's other texts as well as related texts by other authors. It is foreseeable that new printed editions of these texts will also take advantage of these further collaborative efforts, while the work in progress on our project's Web site will allow continuous updating and further integration of both existing and forthcoming printed editions, including the present one.[7]

In this transition from a traditional idea of the scholarly (critical) printed edition as potentially definitive to a more dynamic idea according to which the life of a text is inseparable from its successive readings, interpretations, and reinterpretations (that is, from the historical communities of scholars who "produce" them), perhaps the major methodological (and typographical) burden is on the footnote and the annotation.[8]

Born within print culture, in the digital medium the footnote undergoes a true "renaissance" and metamorphosis. Whoever is familiar with textual

traditions knows that over time annotations can acquire scholarly value in their own right. As Anthony Grafton puts it, in his "curious" history of this "minor" scholarly genre: "Footnotes buttress and undermine, at one and the same time."[9] Of course, the (modern) historian "does not cite authorities but sources," writes Grafton. In an age in which authorities have been superseded by Wikipedia, the notion of "source" itself is undergoing a radical change, often morphing into a collective, almost anonymous, pseudo-authority (or a "crowd," to use a current term, as in "crowdsourcing"). According to this model, successive annotations to an original text may actually produce an entirely new text. Yet, with all its novelty, the transformation of the footnote and rhizomatic proliferation of the gloss in the age of digital inter- or hypertextuality is reminiscent of the way medieval scholastic culture functioned. Within this new technological context, the legacy of Renaissance humanism, representing the work of the humanities as a continuous rediscovery of and dialogue with the distant past, is still extremely relevant. If the humanistic networks of the past relied on letter writing and print for disseminating their ideas, contemporary networks rely on the even more powerful networking tools provided by digital technology.

Pico's own theses can be seen as his synthetic glosses on the whole archive of "knowledge" known to him, and his glosses have somehow become independent from the texts they were originally linked to, standing on their own and ready for scrutiny on their own merits. This is particularly true of the *Conclusiones*. Yet, in order to judge Pico's ideas on their own merits, it is necessary for us to rediscover once again the sources that nourished his thought (thus "following up on one of the basic notions of Pico's own philosophy," as Paul Kristeller (1965, 41) once wrote). This is the inescapable "recursive" (and stratified) nature of humanistic knowledge. In the feedback loop between print and digital text, the gloss, the humble footnote, may evolve from a parasitic to a symbiotic component of the text but remains our way of accumulating (critical) knowledge about the past while engaging in an everlasting dialogue with the perennial sources of our cultural legacy.

The praise and defence of “(human) dignity,” the philosophical concept and moral ideal that gives Pico’s *Oration* its spurious title and everlasting fame, is certainly one of the tenets of the humanistic legacy in our contemporary world. Clearly, a wide historical gulf separates the notion of “dignity” as it is articulated in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948), harkening back to the radical modern transformations brought about by the American and French revolutions, and Pico’s ideas.[10] Yet, the contemporary fortune of Pico’s text, its “rediscovery” in the 1930s and 40s, is undoubtedly linked to the historical context in which it took place: a time when “*human* dignity” was being trampled to the point of leading even some of its defenders to question “humanism” itself as a misleading, self-referential ideology.[11] The same can be said for the current revival of interest in Pico’s thought. If contemporary scholarship (as witnessed by this edition) is less interested in perpetuating old schemes and interpretations than offering a critical reevaluation of the *Oration*’s authentic historical roots, it cannot ignore the renewed debate about the concept of “dignity” in our post-Kantian and “post-humanist” context.[12] In this debate, new definitions come along in the attempt to suggest a broader notion of “dignity” conceived, for example, as a “(modern) virtue.”[13] Such an evolving, “virtual” meaning of “dignity” cannot ignore its classical and religious roots, particularly in a world in which the confrontation and dialogue among religious traditions and beliefs are crucial to a pacific coexistence. From this point of view, there is no doubt that the legacy of Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, Count of Concordia, is still with us.

1 In addition to Pier Cesare Bori (History of Theology and Moral Philosophy, University of Bologna) and Massimo Riva (Italian Studies and Modern Media, Brown University), the group included Dino Buzzetti (History of Medieval Philosophy, University of Bologna), Karen de León-Jones (Italian Studies, Université de Savoie, Chambery), Saverio Marchignoli (Indian Philosophy and History of Orientalism, University of Bologna), Giorgio Melloni (Italian Studies, University of Delaware), and Michael Papio (Italian Studies, University of Massachusetts Amherst).

Francesco Borghesi (Italian Studies, University of Sydney) joined the project in 2001.

2 Franco Bacchelli has identified the hand of Giovanni Nesi. See Bori (2000, 31n61).

3 http://www.brown.edu/Departments/Italian_Studies/vhl_new/. The *Conclusiones* are now available in a complete Spanish translation (the first such translation of Pico's text) edited by Ernesto Priani Saisó (Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, Mexico) and Silvia Magnavacca (University of Buenos Aires, Argentina).

4 The most notable recent addition to the project's site is a sample from the first Chinese translation of Pico's *Oration*, published by Peking University Press, which was the product of a team of scholars at Beida (Peking University) with an introduction in Chinese and Italian by P. C. Bori, *Lun ren de zun yan*, Beijing: Beijing da xue chu ban she, 2010.

5 For an English edition of this work, see Farmer (1998).

6 Respectively, Pier Cesare Bori, §§1–23 (introduction by F. Borghesi and M. Riva); Massimo Riva, §§24–50 (introduction by M. Riva); Michael Papio, §§51–102 (introduction by M. Papio); Saverio Marchignoli, §§103–41 (introduction by S. Marchignoli); Giorgio Melloni, §§142–70 (introduction by G. Melloni, M. Papio, and M. Riva); Dino Buzzetti, §§171–233 (introduction by D. Buzzetti); Karen de León-Jones, §§234–68 (introduction by M. Riva). In order to avoid excessive disruption while reading Pico's *Oration*, all of the above-mentioned introductions are collected in a single *Overview of the Text*, which precedes Pico's text.

7 The first results of this process are Boccaccio (2009), edited and introduced by Michael Papio, and a forthcoming edition of excerpts from Giovanni Villani's thirteenth-century *Cronica*, edited by Rala Potter Diakite and Matthew Sneider, whose preparatory materials have also been processed at the VHL.

8 See the Open Annotation Collaboration (http://www.openannotation.org/).

9 Grafton (1999, 32).

10 Cf. Copenhaver (2002a, 58): “[T]he *Oratio* is not about dignity and freedom as any modern or post-modern reader would understand these terms.”

11 This historical context is evoked by Garin in his introduction to a 1994 revised edition of the *Oration* (Pico 1994).

12 Cf. Fukuyama (2002, 148–77); Habermas (2003, 29–37).

13 Meyer (2002, 195–207). I have addressed this and other related ideas about Pico’s legacy in Riva (2008).

The Historical and Biographical Background of the *Oration*

Pier Cesare Bori

The year 1486 was an extraordinary one for young Pico della Mirandola. In March, at twenty-three years of age, he returned from Paris to his friends Poliziano, Lorenzo de' Medici, and Marsilio Ficino in Florence. On 8 May, Pico departed for Rome, where he intended to prepare for a debate on his philosophical theses with learned men from all corners of the world, invited at his own expense. Two days later, in Arezzo, he unsuccessfully attempted to carry off Margherita, wife of Giuliano de' Medici, an event that caused no small amount of scandal. However, the ensuing period of isolation, spent mainly in Fratta, between Perugia and Todi, was exceptionally productive for Pico. He wrote the *Commento sopra una canzona de amore* (a gloss on the poem written by his friend Girolamo Benivieni) and collected his theses, or *Conclusiones*, some nine hundred of them, in anticipation of the debate that was to take place at the beginning of the following year. For the introduction to this grand event, he also composed an elegant *Oration*, whose title afterward assumed the "epithet" *On the Dignity of Man*. By 7 December, he was in Rome, where the publication of the *Conclusiones* immediately received very negative reactions. At the beginning of 1487, Pope Innocent VIII called off Pico's public debate and convened a theological commission that, some months later, would condemn some of the theses. At the end of that same year, Pico decided to return to Paris.

Is there a connection between the series of events that occurred between May and autumn 1486 and Pico's exceptional intellectual accomplishments of that time? In order to hazard an answer, one must go over those events more analytically, beginning with the incident in Arezzo.[1] By 1486,

Margherita, the wealthy widow of “un Costante spetiale, che teneva cavalli per correre palii” [“a Costante, spice merchant, who kept horses to run in palios”], had remarried the not so wealthy Giuliano di Mariotto de’ Medici, an Aretine tax collector, and had gone to live with him in Arezzo.

According to the account of the Estes’ Florentine envoy Aldobrandino Guidoni, which survives in his letter of 12 May 1486 to Duke Ercole I, the young Pico, admired by the whole of Florence for his erudition and honesty of demeanour, had declared a few days earlier his desire to go to Rome. Having already sent his luggage on ahead toward Perugia, he left Florence accompanied by a fitting escort and stopped in Arezzo, where he attempted to carry off the lady. The letter reads:

> Questo signor conte è stato in questa cità cum tanta reputatione, cum tanta magnificentia et cum una universale bona expectatione di facti suoi, quanto che homo che mai fusse qui in questa cità, però che parea veramente non potesse essere possibile la doctrina et scientia che era in lui.
>
> Il povero signore levò la voce, a questi dì, de volere andare a Roma; et parve che facesse caricare tute le robe sue et adviarle verso Perosa. Poi lui seguitò cum tuta la famiglia, che erano de le persone a piedi et cavallo, da 20; et haveva dui balestrieri a cavallo; et andaro ad Arezo, ove era ita una sua amorosa bellissima.[2]
>
> [This *signor* Count enjoyed in this city great distinction, prestige and universal confidence in his deeds, more so than any other man who had ever lived here in this city; hence, it truly seemed that his erudition and knowledge were beyond belief.
>
> The poor Count made it known in those days that he intended to travel to Rome; and it seemed that he had loaded up all of his things and sent them toward Perugia. Then he followed afterward with all of his servants, and there were twenty people on horseback and on foot; and

> he had two crossbowmen on horseback; and they went to Arezzo, where his most beautiful beloved had gone.]

According to Giuliano (the offended husband), Margherita had been abducted on the morning of 10 May against her will. He writes to his cousin Lorenzo de' Medici:

> Iermattina andando la Margherita, mia donna, colla serva pigliare recreatione al Duomo Vecchio da fuori d'Arezo, fu da gente del signore della Mirandola, contra sua volontà, presa e messa a cavallo et in groppa a gente di sua famiglia colla quale era il decto signore; che per questo era venuto la sera dinanzi qui agli alberghi d'Arezo, con circa 20 cavagli et con balestrieri acti a far male; et menorronla via, cavalcando quanto potevano.[3]

> [Yesterday morning, as my lady Margherita was going with her servant to the Old Duomo outside Arezzo for a stroll, she was taken against her will by the Count of Mirandola's men, was put on a horse and was carried off with some of his servants in the company of the aforementioned Count who, for this purpose, had lodged the previous evening in Arezzo with about 20 horses and crossbowmen ready to cause harm. They led her away, galloping as fast as they could.]

Giuliano also laments the betrayal of one of his young subordinates who, moreover, supposedly stole more than 80 florins from him. Even the letter of the Signoria of Arezzo to Lorenzo de' Medici on 10 May reports that Margherita "fu a tradimento, et armata manu […] et per força messa a cavallo" ["was betrayed and forcibly put upon a horse by armed men"].[4]

According to Aldobrandino Guidoni, however, the lady had left the city of Arezzo "infogata de lo amore del Conte" ["inflamed with love for the Count"].[5] Luigi della Stufa similarly informs Lorenzo de' Medici that the woman, "come innamorata e ciecha di sì bel corpo, volontariamente montò a cavallo in groppa a uno de' due mandati" ["in love and blinded by such an attractive man, voluntarily mounted the horse of one of the two men who

had been sent for her"].[6] Stefano Taverna, the Milanese envoy in Florence, said that the Count had been "provocato da una femina formosa impazita di luy" ["provoked by a shapely woman who was mad about him"].[7] Giovanni Pico's sister, Costanza Bentivoglio, wrote to her brother Girolamo di Piacenza that "la femina lo seguiva volontariamente" ["the woman followed him voluntarily"].[8]

The accounts of what happened next are consistent. Filippo Carducci, head official and podestà of Arezzo (as he explained to Lorenzo de' Medici on that very afternoon), had the bells rung and ordered that the Count be tracked down by his men, who were joined by as many as two hundred volunteers. Pico was captured near Marciano, on the border with Siena. According to Luigi della Stufa:

> gli aretini hebono più gente. […] N'amazorno XVIII et il magnifico signore fu ferito malamente et se non si fussi stato il buon chavallo che haveva sotto, rimaneva anche lui in compagnia de' 18.[9]
>
> [the people of Arezzo had more men. […] They killed eighteen and the magnificent *Signore* himself was seriously wounded; and if he hadn't had a good horse beneath him, he too would have found himself in the company of those eighteen.]

The Aretine Council of Ten ordered that Pico and his secretary, Cristoforo da Casale Maggiore, be held in the custody of the man who, working with the pursuers, had captured him (a certain Giovanni Nicolacci da Marciano), and that the things remaining on the small battlefield be retrieved. Not long afterward, however, the Count was released by his guard in exchange for one hundred florins. For this, Giovanni Nicolacci was fined in January 1487 by the council of the Otto di Guardia of Florence, while Pico's secretary was punished as "colui da cui era derivato tutto il male" ("the man from whom all the trouble stemmed").[10]

Had anyone else perpetrated such an offence against the Medici, justice would have been meted out quite differently. Behind the scenes of this

privileged treatment was Lorenzo de' Medici himself, who wrote to Arezzo's Signoria on 13 May to express his regret for the "ingiuria fatta a Giuliano de' Medici" ["injustice done to Giuliano de' Medici"], albeit without mentioning the responsible party.[11] Lorenzo's desire to pardon and protect his young friend was shared by Ercole I d'Este, who answered his envoy, Aldobrandino Guidoni, saying that he was very sorry about what had taken place, "perché teneramente amamo epso magnifico conte Zohane" ["because I tenderly love this magnificent count Giovanni"], and begged him to see to Pico's liberation as if he were "nostro fratello" ["my brother"]. Ercole I forgave Pico, citing biblical precedents, "che certo le sono cose che anche Salamone, che fue tanto sapientissimo, incorse anchora lui alcuna volta in simile trasgressione; sì che, il gli è da havere compassione" ["for, in truth, even Solomon, for all his wisdom, sometimes committed similar misdeeds; thus, one should have compassion for him"].[12]

The Count's public image nonetheless suffered a great deal on account of the "chaso atroce" ["atrocious event"] of Arezzo.[13] Aldobrandino Guidoni wrote from Florence to Duke Ercole I:

> Et veramente questo caso è di natura che a tuta questa città rencresce perché questo conte Zohanne havea in questa cità uno nome del più docto homo che fusse uno buon pezo; et era reputato uno sancto; ora ha perso la reputatione et conditione sua.[14]

> [And, truly, the nature of this event is such that the whole of this city is saddened, for this Count Giovanni had the reputation of being the most learned man that there had been in this city in a long time. He was deemed a saint; now he has lost his good name and position.]

Other documents give us additional, sometimes detailed, information on the aftermath of the event. Some regard the recovery of things that were lost or stolen during the skirmish:

> Restaci un cavallo di quelli del Signore appresso l'oste; una cappa rosata foderata di panno verde, due balestre d'acciaio con un

> martinecto; et un turchasso con sette passatoi; una cappetta di tane trista,[15] con capperuccia foderata di damaschino pagonazzo; un giacho di maglio et una cintola di cuoio di pesce fornita d'ariento.[16]
>
> [One of the Count's horses was left behind with the innkeeper. Other items include a rose-coloured cape lined with green cloth, two steel crossbows with a gaffle, and a quiver with seven arrows, a small cape of cheap russet with a little hood lined with purple damask, a mail tunic and a fishskin belt embellished with silver.]

But of the Count himself during those days and months that followed, we have no news. And regarding Margherita, we know only that she was returned to her husband. However, from a comment made by Flavius Mithridates – Pico's principal colleague, of Jewish origin, who enriched his translations of cabalistic texts with poignant personal observations – it seems we can gather that Margherita, at the end of 1486 or the beginning of 1487, would have been willing to join the Count in Rome, even if she were pregnant. Indeed, she would have been able to do so had Pico so desired.[17] But for Giovanni Pico, several months had passed and meanwhile several important changes had occurred.

After a few months of silence, starting in September of the same year,[18] news of Pico began to reappear in letters.[19] Marsilio Ficino wrote to Pico on 8 September 1486, asking him to return his Arabic Koran.[20] In Pico's reply,[21] he promised to return it to Ficino shortly, as soon as he could return to Perugia, which he had left on account of the plague. He wrote to Ficino enthusiastically about his linguistic studies. He was making progress in Arabic and Aramaic, after acquiring a fair knowledge of Hebrew (a language in which it seems he would have been able to compose a letter). Pico could not believe that such extraordinary things had happened to him by chance; they must have taken place in accordance with divine will and with the consent of a celestial being who benevolently assisted him in his studies,[22] which were facilitated by "the leap of the soul, work and diligence, despite a certain physical weakness." He enthusiastically read writings of the Chaldean wise man, who was useful in clarifying what the

Hellenic tradition presented in an incomplete and imperfect form (see Bori 2000, 63–68).

Pico read Arab authors, such as “the letters of Mohammed of Toledo and Abulgal, who studied with Averroes, and the questions of a certain Adelando […] who philosophized under Ammonius, Plotinus’s teacher in Egypt.”[23] Pico found these works so stimulating, full as they were of “Pythagorean concepts and replete with ancient notions and esoteric thought,” that they convinced him to study those languages in order to have direct access to the texts. Ficino seems to have encouraged Pico to resume his study of Plotinus. Pico assured him in his reply that he had never abandoned Plotinus and, indeed, would continue to study him.[24]

Pico was enthusiastically enraptured by his discoveries. Swept up by a kind of hermeneutic ecstasy, he applied to himself the words of Saint Paul:

> Hic est Marsili meus cupido, hi mei ignes, qui non fluxam et vanam, sed firmam mihi non pollicentur iam, sed praestant voluptatem, veram imaginem futurae gloriae, quae revelabitur in nobis.[25]
>
> [This, Marsilio, is my passion, these are the flames with which I burn, and for me there is not only the promise, but the gift of joy, which is not fleeting and vain but stable: the true image of the future glory that will be revealed in us.]

We are witnessing here the original “nucleus” of the *Oration*; through *eros* (that is, fire), Pico has at this point attained divine glory by way of a spiritual journey in which this intellectual quest of his plays a central role. Pico hoped that there would also be some public recognition: in the solitude of Fratta, he put the finishing touches on the speech with which he would make public his discoveries in Rome. There, he would break with the customary esoteric discourse that characterized a great part of the traditions with which he was concerned.[26]

Thus, the certainty of eschatological glory was mingled with the expectation of present glory. The upcoming philosophical debate in Rome occupied his every thought. Pico placed enormous importance on the event: a triumph would follow his heroic and intellectual deeds and would erase the dishonour of the undertaking in Arezzo. This theme was frequent in the letters of the period. Pico also spoke of it in a brief undated letter to Taddeo Ugolino, written "ex Fracta": "Romam propero" ["I am hurrying toward Rome]."[27]

What did Pico have in mind? What should have happened in Rome? Pico, speaking in his *Oration* of the future debate, says:

> Sunt qui hoc quidem exercitationis genus non improbent, sed in me nullo modo probent, quod ego hac aetate, quartum scilicet et vigesimum modo natus annum, de sublimibus Christianae theologiae mysteriis, de altissimis philosophiae locis, de incognitis disciplinis, in celebratissima urbe, in amplissimo doctissimorum hominum consessu, in apostolico senatu disputationem proponere sim ausus. (§154)

> [There are also others who, though not critical of this kind of exercise in itself, entirely disapprove of it in me who, born just twenty-four years ago, have at my age dared to propose a discussion on the sublime mysteries of Christian theology, on the most profound questions of philosophy and on unexplored fields of knowledge, all in such a famous city, before a vast assembly of learned men and in the presence of the apostolic senate.]

Perhaps Pico was thinking precisely of the College of Cardinals, presided over by Innocent VIII, to whom in the preface to the second part of the *Conclusiones* he solemnly entrusted the verdict on his own Christian orthodoxy.[28] The interest in debates, born in the context of the medieval university, was still very much alive, and Pico's initiative took its place in that framework. It was not, therefore, the idea of a debate but rather the number of the theses, the vastness and novelty of their themes, and the

figure of Pico himself that attracted attention and rendered the episode exceptional in the eyes of his contemporaries.

In the same period, Pico wrote from Fratta to Baldo Perugino, who remained in Perugia, the city from which Pico had fled on account of the plague. In this letter, Pico sends him a *Carmen pro pace*, recently written amid rumours of war.[29] He tells Baldo Perugino: "cecidit et per hos dies etrusca lingua de amore carmen, quod cum illo venit, a paucis, nisi fallor, intelligendum: est enim pluribus ex secretiori antiquorum philosophia mysteriis refertum" [In these days, a poem on love written in the Tuscan language has fallen upon me, one that came with it and, unless I am mistaken, is accessible to very few men: indeed, it is replete with many mysteries from the most secret philosophy of the ancients]. These are difficult lines to interpret and to translate. It would be nice to think that the Tuscan poem "on love" that reached him during those days in Fratta was the *Canzona de amore* by Girolamo Benivieni, a work that was becoming ever more closely connected to his *Commento sopra una canzona de amore*, itself very difficult to understand insofar as it is full of the philosophic mysteries of the ancients. But could this be the meaning of "cecidit" ["has fallen"] and "venit" ["came"]? In any event, it seems clear to me that we are dealing here with the same social and philosophical context in which the *Commento* was taking shape, for during that period Pico was engaged in nothing other than literary "otium."

We can now better understand the letter's final humorous allusion:

> Faciam quod mones, ne, si quam forte Dianam viderim, quod de Tirhesia scribit Callimacus mihi eveniat.
>
> [I will follow your warning not to go too often to bathe in Fratta so that, if perchance I saw a Diana, what Callimachus writes of Tiresias will not happen to me.]

Callimachus's hymn *In lavacrum Palladis* had not long before been translated from Greek by Poliziano. In it, we read of how Tiresias was

blinded as punishment for having dared to look at Pallas bathing but received the gift of prophecy in return (vv. 75ff.).[30]

On 15 October, in a long letter to Andrea Corneus (of Cornia), Pico spoke of the events of May. He rejected Corneus's suggestion that he dedicate himself with increased vigour to the active life, protesting in favour of the contemplative life and the practice of philosophy as a man of his class, a prince, rather than as a paid professor of philosophy. His friend would soon see the extraordinary, and also public – even clamorous – results of Pico's solitary studies (see Bori 2000, 73–84). At the letter's close, Pico spoke "de re uxoria" of the event in Arezzo:

> Quod amicum illum tuum, cui in amore res male cessit apud Floreanum nostrum excusaveris, ex officio fecisti, habet ille quidem et ex historiis, et ex poetis, ex ipsa etiam philosophia unde se a nota criminis vendicet, habet unde magnorum se hominum praeiudiciis, Davidis praesertim Salomonisque tutetur, ut Aristotelem taceam, qui dum nonnullas etiam meretrices saepe deperibat, suorum de moribus praeceptorum nil meminit, quando amatae foeminae uti Cereri Eleusinae sacra fecit. Sed ille haec tutamenta, et quasi propugnacula sui facinoris, non amplexatur modo, vel amat, sed odit, et reiicit, et recusant; iacturam queritur suma, non culpam deprecatur, dolet quod peccavit, non defendit. Et mihi quidem vel hoc nomine caeteris excusandus, quod ipse se nil excusat, nihil homine imbecillius, nihil amore potentius. Hieronymi illa invicta et inconcussa mens, dum coelo tota inhaeret, puellarum choris intererat. Quae illum pestis potuit vel infestare, quem non edomabit? Si hoc amor in eremo, in humo collisis membris, in hebdomadarum potuit inedia, quid in pluma, in umbra, in omni deliciarum affluentia non poterit? Accedit quod ille nunc primo cecidit ruinae huius alioquin insolens et ignarus. De Neptuno conqueri potest, qui semel tantum naufragium fecit. Si ad eundem iterum offenderit lapidem, nemo manum porrigat, nemo misereatur. Nunc non excusari iure non potest, quem ita facti poenitet, ut favore excusationis se dignum ipse non existimet. Sed haec etiam nimis, quando amicus tuus huiusmodi facti memoriam, non solum aliquo modo literas tradi, sed quod sequens vita eius faciat obliterari penitus cupit.[31]

> [You felt the need to pardon your friend for his misfortunes in love in our Floreanus (Arezzo). He could indeed find in history, in poets, and even in philosophy itself examples with which to pardon himself and defend himself, with the authority of great men, especially David and Solomon, to say nothing of Aristotle, who, while often flirting even with prostitutes, completely lost sight of the moral lessons he gave whenever he was sacrificing to his beloved as if to Eleusinian Ceres. But your friend not only does not share or appreciate but indeed hates, rejects, and refutes this kind of pardon and defence of his crime. He regrets the damage he has done; he does not flee his error. He suffers for having sinned; he does not defend himself. Others will be able to pardon that which he in no way pardons in himself. Nothing is weaker than man; nothing is mightier than love. Jerome’s unconquerable and unshaken mind, while wholly focused on heaven, participated in the girls’ dances. If this plague could threaten such a man, who else could it not have conquered? If love could obtain so much from him who slept on the bare earth of his hovel and fasted for eight days, what will it not be able to do to one who sleeps on feathers, in the shade, and lives amidst a great abundance of delights? What is more, he fell the first time, for he was unaccustomed to and ignorant of such precipices. He who has shipwrecked only once can cry out to Neptune. If he falls again and strikes the same rock, no one will offer a hand or have pity on him. Now, he who so repents of what he has done that he does not deem himself worthy of being pardoned may be justly forgiven. This is all the more the case when your friend not only wishes somehow to entrust to the written word the memory of that event but also desires that the rest of his life serve completely to blot it out.]

There were, indeed, those who had laughed at the event, for example his friend Alessandro Cortesi, who had written to his brother, “we laughed at Paris and Helen: sometimes philosophers go mad”).[32] There were those who had wanted to pardon Pico, such as Ercole I, who cited Solomon, and Andrea Corneus, too. Even Marsilio Ficino had written a short “Apology on the Rape of the Nymph Margherita by the Hero Pico,” using mythological motifs (Paris and Helen, Theseus and Ariadne, Hercules and Iole, Pluto and

Proserpine, Jove and Europa) as well as evangelical ones, such as the parable of the merchant who acquires a precious pearl, “inventa pretiosa margarita” [“having found a precious *margarita* (‘pearl or Margherita’)”]. In his apology to Pietro Leone, Ficino had also affirmed that: “It is not abducting to receive or take a nymph who has fallen prey to someone and desires to be abducted; it is instead a liberation from her abductors.”[33] Flavius Mithridates had also spoken about it in the same ironic tone in the margins of a passage in his version of the *Bahir*, an ancient source of Jewish esotericism.[34]

Pico had set out on a path that would change his life. Here, illustrious examples are not enough to remove the onus of responsibility. He suffered for his sin, hated it, detested it, publicly admitted his fault, repented, and firmly resolved never to repeat it: “dolet quod peccavit, non defendit” [“he suffers for having sinned; he does not defend himself”], “facti poenitet” [“he repents”]. It is the Christian language of conversion, confession, and penitence that confers a certain note of sincerity to Pico’s humanistic Latin, together with echoes of Psalm 50 (51 in Protestant versions), which the Bible attributes to David.

In his commentary on Psalm 10 a few years later, Pico himself, speaking perhaps in the spirit of Savonarola, would condemn:

> de nostri temporis tepid[e]s qui sub caerimoniarum religionisque praetextu sanctitatem mentiuntur et simplices et rectos corde, a spiritu et veritate deterrentes, ad propriam vanitatem trahere satagunt.[35]
>
> [the tepid people of our time who, under the pretext of ceremonies and devotion, feign holiness, distract the simple and honest at heart from the spirit and the truth and, bustling about, draw them into their own vanity.]

Gianfrancesco echoes this passage with the same reference to the “worship in spirit and in truth” (the important passage of the Gospel according to

John)[36] as he describes Pico in his *Biography of Pico della Mirandola*, which precedes Pico's writings in the first Bolognese edition of 1496:

> Esterioris latriae cultus non multum diligens fuerat; non de eo loquimur, quem observandum praecepit Ecclesia (gestasse hunc quippe prae oculis eum vidimus) sed de his ceremoniis mentionem facimus, quas nonnulli posthabito vero cultu Dei, qui in spiritu et veritate colendus est, prosequuntur et provehunt.[37]
>
> [He was not very diligent about outward observances. I do not refer to what the Church prescribes (we saw him practice it with our own eyes) but to those ceremonies to which some people dedicate themselves, neglecting the real worship of God, Who should be adored in spirit and truth.]

It is likely that Pico's penitential attitude during autumn 1486 was accompanied by the corresponding sacraments, but of this we cannot be sure. Nevertheless, it is certain that he took it on himself to read a page of the Gospel every day.

It is interesting to note – though I believe no one has yet done so – how a final page of the *Commento sopra una canzona de amore*, which Pico probably finished in the days when he wrote to Corneus, reflects a similar state of mind: pain, repentance, a firm desire to change his life. In the *Commento*, while following Benivieni's verses, Pico revisits the motif of "the ladder of amorous degrees" of Plato's *Symposium* with a nod, however provocative, to Marsilio Ficino's recent *De amore*. Indeed, Pico explicitly wrote to Domenico Benivieni that the *Commento sopra una canzona de amore* should be followed by a full-fledged commentary on the *Symposium*.[38] Describing the first, lowest rung of this ladder, he states that it is superior to "bestiale furore" ["bestial fury"], which is not actually love. Pico speaks of this type of emotion with a harshness and realism reminiscent of his letter to Corneus, which is again brought to mind by Pico's rejection of the facile consolation derived from examples of illustrious sinners, such as David, Solomon, Jerome, and Aristotle:

Chi è nel primo grado tanto è felice quanto l'amato gli è presente, condizione in ogni modo assai migliore di quello bestiale furore e non amore, el cui bene non può se non per piccolo tempo durare e non può non lassare dopo sé se non longissima amaritudine e penitenzia; il che doverebbe essere a ciascuno sufficiente stimulo a farlo con celerrima fuga da questa essecranda voluttà rimuovere[39] e con festinatissimo corso a quel celeste amore properare ove niuno vestigio di miseria, ma ogni plenitudine di felicità si truova. Né debbe allettare veruno a questa misera voluttà l'essere stati molti e per santità e per prudenza e per dottrina celebratissimi uomini da quella presi, anzi questo debbe essere a ciascuno invece di ragione efficacissima a mostrare che quella in tutto si debba con ogni ingegno fuggire. Perocché se questo male è sì pestifero e velenoso che abbia in sì forte e perfette anime potuto generare egritudini quasi incurabili, debbe ciascuno indubitamente persuadersi che nella sua abbia a partorire letale al tutto e mortifero morbo: di che meritamente si può concludere, chiunque in tale precipizio ruina, di sé medesimo e de' suoi mal composti pensieri, da Dio correzione e paterna punizione, dagli uomini forse non meno pietà e compassione che biasimo meritare.[40]

[A person who is in the first stage of love is happy as long as his beloved is in his presence, a condition much better in every way than that of animals, which is lust rather than love. The pleasure of lust lasts only a short time, and it inevitably leaves behind it endless bitterness and repentance. This fact ought to be sufficient deterrent to make anyone get away from this despicable form of desire as fast as possible and hasten by the fastest route to heavenly love, in which there is no trace of misery but rather the most complete bliss. No one should be attracted to this wretched form of desire by the fact that many men have been overcome by it who were famous for their sanctity, prudence, and learning. On the contrary, this fact ought to be instead a most persuasive argument to everyone that he should avoid lust entirely. For, if this evil is so pestiferous and poisonous that it has been able to produce an almost incurable disease in such strong and able souls, certainly everyone else ought to be persuaded that it is likely to produce an utterly lethal and deadly disease in his own soul. Thus we

> may justly conclude that anyone who falls over such a precipice deserves from God fatherly punishment for himself and correction for his confused thinking; from men perhaps he deserves more pity and compassion than blame.]
>
> (Pico 1984, 167)

On the subject of “bestiale furore” [“bestial fury”], a further passage from the *Commento* is worthy of note:

> L’opposto è nello amore celeste, nel quale non è questo pericolo, ma tutto tende alla bellezza spirituale dell’animo e dello intelletto, la quale molto più perfetta si truova ne’ maschi che nelle donne, come d’ogni altra perfezione si vede. Però tutti coloro che di questo divino amore sono stati accesi hanno la maggior parte amato qualche giovane di indole generosa, la cui virtù è stata ad alcuni tanto più grata quanto l’è stata in un bel corpo, e non si sono effeminati drieto ad un armento di meretrice, le quali non solo non inducono l’uomo a grado alcuno di spirituale perfezione, ma, come Circe, al tutto lo trasformano in bestia.[41]
>
> [The opposite is true in heavenly love: heavenly love involves no danger of coitus but rather is directed entirely toward the spiritual beauty of the soul, or the intellect. This spiritual beauty is much more perfect in men than in women, as is true of any other attribute. This is the reason why most men who have been affected by heavenly love have loved some young man of virtuous character (the more beautiful his body, the more attractive his virtue) rather than become effeminate and pursue a flock of harlots, who not only do not lead a man to any degree of spiritual perfection but, like Circe, completely transform him into a beast.]
>
> (Pico 1984, 133)

With regard to this passage, which recalls the description of man’s protean character from the beginning of the *Oration*, Erwin Panofsky noted that

Ficino, faithful to the *Symposium* and to its two Venuses, fails to attribute to any Venus *amor ferinus*, which is equated with folly.[42] Pico, on the contrary, conflates the heavenly Venuses in order to attribute to the earthly Venus the abovementioned evils. One may ask if this choice, beyond being a reflection of different theoretical orientations (as Panofsky maintains), could be a consequence of Pico's recent experience, which leads him to misogyny and to privilege male friendships, and his friendship with Benivieni above all.[43] Even more pertinent here are Edgar Wind's conclusions,[44] which describe how Pico broke with Ficino's hedonistic triad, *Pulchritudo-Amor-Voluptas* ("Beauty-Love-Pleasure"), still present on his medal (datable to around 1484–85), in order to move on to the more austere *Pulchritudo-Intellectus-Voluntas* ("Beauty-Intelligence-Will")[45] (one remembers the severe treatment of pleasure in the previously mentioned passage of the *Commento* and also the authentic "gioia non fugace e vana, ma stabile" ["joy that is not fleeting and vain, but stable"] in the letter to Ficino of September 1486).

Nevertheless, the tone of these passages lets us glimpse how much Pico himself was involved in the *Commento sopra una canzona de amore di Benivieni* (which could imply his rereading of the *Symposium*). Certainly, Pico explicitly chose to compose the *Commento* "according to the thoughts and opinions of the Platonists." The work has as its model the conversion (*periagogé*) of the soul (*Republic*) and its ascent (the *Symposium*'s *anagogé*), while in the letter to Corneus the concept of penitence, together with its concomitant biblical language (e.g., *metánoia*, "conversio mentis ad Christum" [the conversion of the mind to Christ]), takes centre stage. In the first linguistic and theoretical model, conversion is toward Christ; in the second, it is toward beauty, personified by the Celestial Venus. (Botticelli's *Birth of Venus* was also finished in 1486.[46]) Pico addresses the same subject (his own moral transformation), turning to two religious, cultural, and linguistic models: Plato and the Bible. I would propose the hypothesis that it is precisely in this "bilingualism"[47] that we see the first and most original manifestation of his "multifaceted philosophy," his pluralistic theoretical perspective, and his capacity to see reality in the light of innumerable points of view.[48]

All that has been said up to now throws light on Pico's most important text of this period, the *Oration on the Dignity of Man*. The first part of the *Oration* is dominated by the theme of *eros* according to the Platonic-Dionysian model of conversion-ascent. It is quite probable that Pico's personal experiences performed an important function in his decision to employ this model. It seems that he speaks in the *Oration* from a personal perspective, moving from his newly acquired awareness of the dangerous ambiguities (but also of the extraordinarily constructive power) of *eros*. To Corneus he had written, "nihil amore potentius" ["nothing is mightier than love"]. Having learned to control the power of *eros*, Pico would be able to push himself to the most arduous intellectual discoveries in order to open the way toward becoming one with an ineffable absolute.

That Pico is in some way speaking of himself in the *Oration* and describing something that concerns him personally is especially clear in his letter to Girolamo Benivieni of 12 November. There is little time left now before his departure for Rome. Two days earlier, on 10 November, he wrote to an unnamed friend that he was unable to provide a certain bit of information, as his books had already left for Rome and he himself had already put on his hat and boots for the journey ("petasatus iam et caligatus").[49] Meanwhile, the material to be presented in Rome continued to increase:

> Disputanda per me publice dogmata ante tuum a me discessum 700[is] claudebantur. Postquam abisti, ad 900[a] excreverunt progrediebanturque nisi receptui cecinissem, ad mille. Sed placuit eo numero, utpote mystico, pedem esistere. Est enim (si vera est nostra de numeris doctrina) symbolum animae in se ipsam oestro Musarum percitae recurrentis. Accessit et orationi id quod ad te mitto. Cum enim statutum sit mihi ut nulla praetereat dies quin legam ex Evangelica doctrina, incidit in manus, postridie quam decesseras, illud Christi: "Pacem meam do vobis, pacem meam do vobis, pacem relinquo vobis." Illico subita quadam animi concitatione de pace quaedam ad philosophiae laudes facentia tanta celeritate distavi, ut notarii manum precurrerem saepe et invertirem. Desideravi, quod et semper desidero,

vel tunc maxime [te] mecum esse, ut recens opus auribus, quasi e gremio editum infantem, benignius auditor exciperes.[50]

[The theses to be discussed before your departure were contained within 700. After your departure, they increased to 900, and they would have grown to 1000 had I not sounded the retreat. But I wanted to stop at that number, as a mystic number. If my doctrine of numbers is true, 900 is the symbol of the soul that recedes into itself, struck by the incitement of the Muses. What I am sending you has been added to the oration. I resolved not to let a day pass without reading something from the Gospels' teachings and, the day after your departure, what Christ said fell before my eyes: "I give you my peace, I give you my peace, peace I leave you." Immediately, I then excitedly dictated some things on peace and in praise of philosophy, and I did it with such haste that I often outpaced and confused the hand of the secretary. I wished, as I always do, that you were there with me (but especially so at that moment) so that you yourself could listen benevolently to the new text that, almost like a newborn child, had just issued from the womb.]

In this period, Pico reads the Gospel every day, and a new passage of the *Oration* is born from his reading of John 14:27. Pico speaks about it with emotion, as if it were a birth: the scribe's pen cannot keep up with him.[51] This passage is probably itself linked to the reference, in the earlier version, to the strife between hatred and love, a conflict from which Empedocles laments "being tossed upon the seas, driven by conflict and discord like a madman and banished from the gods" (cf. *Oration* §86). But in the new text the idea of war becomes more concrete. Pico knew not only intellectual battles; he also knew what war was, for Italy was then wholly consumed by it. Shortly before, Pico had written his *Carmen pro pace* in the hopes that God would avert a war that was roaring throughout all of Italy, in which "everything is laid waste, the sword destroys all."[52]

War was practiced by the Pico clan almost as if it were the family trade, and it raged among Pico’s relatives as well. His brothers Galeotto and Anton Maria fought ferociously with each other to secure the family patrimony, while Pico renounced his rights in favour of Gianfrancesco.[53] Pico’s mother had nursed other ambitions for him,[54] and he was spared the violence of conflict until a few months before, when he himself was the cause of bloodshed. Pico now knew from personal experience that at the root of all things lay man’s natural disposition. Peace, he wrote, must be achieved through self-discipline. Such would be the peace that “will ratify an everlasting pact of the most holy peace between the flesh and the spirit.”

On the basis of this personal revelation, then, it is a scientific approach to natural philosophy that “will allay the differences of opinion and disagreements that vex, perplex and afflict our restless soul from all sides.” But since nature, according to Heraclitus, was created from war, this yearned-for peace will be attained only by embracing Wisdom, who cries out:

> Venite […] ad me qui laborastis; venite et ego reficiam vos; venite ad me et dabo vobis pacem quam mundus et natura vobis dare non possunt. (§93)
>
> [Come to me, you who exert yourselves in vain; come and I will restore you; come to me and I will give you that peace which the world and nature cannot give to you.]

Behind this exhortation lies perhaps the nucleus of Giovanni Pico’s experience on the morning of 12 November 1486. After months of “long-lasting bitterness and repentance,” he expresses a sense of recovery and reconciliation:

> Haec est illa […] pax quam facit Deus in excelsis suis, quam angeli in terram descendentes annuntiarunt hominibus bonae voluntatis, ut per eam ipsi homines ascendentes in caelum angeli fierent. Hanc pacem

> amicis, hanc nostro optemus seculo, optemus unicuique domui quam ingredimur, optemus animae nostrae, ut per eam ipsa Dei domus fiat. (§§95–96)
>
> [This is the […] peace which God makes in His heavens, which the angels who came down to earth announced to men of good will so that these men would, ascending to heaven, be transformed by it into angels. Let us desire this peace for our friends, for our times; let us desire it for whatever home we enter. Let us desire it for our soul so that in her may be made a house of the Lord.]

It is not without reason, then, that in his *Vita* Gianfrancesco Pico revisits and clarifies in Christian terms the motivations for Pico's letter to Andrea Corneus. He speaks of Pico's "conversion to Christ" and how he had moved away from earthly pleasures. Passing over the incident in Arezzo, Gianfrancesco asserts that the greatest influence on Pico's state of mind after his conversion was "simultas," the animosity of the Roman environment, against which his expectations of glory were shattered. It was only at that point, and not immediately after the Arezzo incident, that, according to Gianfrancesco, Pico awoke and understood the vanity of human glory:

> Prius enim et gloriae cupidus et amore vano succensus, mulieribusque illecebris commotus fuerat: foeminarum quippe plurimae, ob vanustate corporis orisque gratiam, cui doctrina amplexaeque divitiae et generis nobilitas accedebant, in eius amorem exarserunt; ab quorum studio non abhorrens, parumper via vitae posthabita, in delicias defluxerat: verum simultate illa experrectus, diffluentem luxu animum retudit et convertit ad Christum, atque foeminea blandimenta in supernae patriae gaudia commutavit, neglectaque aura gloriae, quam affectaverat, Dei gloriam et ecclesiae utilitatem tota coepit mente perquirere, adeoque mores componere, ut post hac vel inimico iudice comprobari posset.[55]
>
> [Earlier, desirous of glory and inflamed by vain love, he had let himself be moved by feminine allurements. The attractiveness of his

> body and the charm of his appearance, in addition to his erudition, great riches, and family's nobility, had caused many women to burn with love for him. Not being averse to such desires of theirs, he had abandoned himself for a bit to wantonness and had neglected the true way of life. But having been awoken by this confusion, he set aright his mind, which had languished in pleasures, and turned it to Christ. What is more, he transformed feminine flatteries into the joys of the supernal fatherland. Heedless of the gleam of glory for which he had yearned, he took to seeking with all the powers of his mind the glory of God and the service of the Church, and righted his ways such that even those who were his enemies would approve of him.]

In light of my earlier suggestion that Pico probably considered the success of the debate to be extraordinarily important to the reconstruction of his own image, one can see how the failure of this undertaking may have weighed on him. Moreover, it is clear that this failure could then have occasioned yet another period of maturation for him, the one culminating in that complete "conversion" of which Gianfrancesco Pico wrote. Nevertheless, in order to protect his uncle's reputation, Gianfrancesco both avoids mention of the "atrocious event" of Arezzo and omits significant reflections on Pico's life and works.

Since his premature death, the figure of Pico has continued to live on in the popular imagination and to attract scholarly attention. There has been a great deal of research on Pico in the last century, especially between the 500-year anniversaries of his birth and death. There have been important conferences; new editions and translations of his works have appeared; and his sources have been minutely researched.[56] Amidst this flurry of scholarly activity, there persists a decades-old division between the two fundamental interpretive schools of thought related to Pico and, in particular, to his works of 1486 (the *Commento*, the *Theses*, and above all the *Oration*). The dominant tendency in Pico studies begins with Burckhardt, is carried on by Gentile, Garin, Cassirer, and Kristeller, and is currently represented by some recent contributions to Pico's thought on magic, astrology, the esoteric, the Cabala, and syncretism. The other tendency sees in Pico's

works a continuation of the theological tradition, from the Bible to the Church Fathers and Scholastic theology. Among its representatives, De Lubac stands out with his *Pic de la Mirandole* (1974) for genuine pathos and a high degree of erudition. In his *Freiheit zu Gott* (1989), Reinhardt likewise insisted, but with a different style and with different sensibilities, on the pre-modern character of Pico's "systematic" way of thinking.[57]

Giovanni Pico did not circulate the *Oration*. Not until 1496, two years after Pico's death, did his nephew, Gianfrancesco, publish in Bologna, among his uncle's other works, that "elegantissima orazione" ["most elegant oration"], which would receive the subtitle "De hominis dignitate" beginning with the Strasbourg edition of Pico's works in 1504. Both the *Commento*, published only in 1519 among the works of Girolamo Benivieni, and the *Conclusiones*, after its publication on 7 December 1486 in Rome prior to the debate that never took place, remained out of circulation for a very long time. One can understand why Giovanni Pico wanted to move beyond the painful events of 1487 and to set aside these texts once and for all.

Our conjecture regarding the composition of the *Oration* is that it was carried out in four stages. The first phase can be dated to mid-September 1486, with Pico's letter to Marsilio Ficino mentioned earlier, which attests to Pico's philological enthusiasm above all for the "Chaldean" (actually Aramaic) sources. This phase corresponds, almost directly, to the beginning of the second short part of the *Oration* in the version documented by the manuscript Palatino 885 (P).[58] In the middle of September, Pico was perhaps also beginning the *Commento sopra una canzona de amore* (see the letter to Baldo Perugino). In this period of enthusiasm, he must have circulated among his friends this first version, which also survived for a while afterward, at a time when he would have wanted to erase every trace of the failed debate and its distressing aftermath. The manuscript Palatino 885 bears witness to this first phase, although the copy is rather imperfect and damaged (begging the inevitable comparison with R, the edited version of the text), consequences of a wide circulation regardless of Pico's intentions.[59]

The structure of the text in P (Palatino 885) is simple. The first part fundamentally coincides with the edited text R: the dignity of man consists of an itinerary, which, like that of the angels, can unite him with God. This path is threefold, and the intermediate stage is based on contemplation and philosophy, in accordance with numerous traditions, both biblical and otherwise. The second part (*Oration* §§147–90) is very short[60] and explains two points of Pico's method. In order "to obtain fully" the philosophy that he "ardently pursues," two things are of utmost importance: full knowledge of the sources and the ability to engage in debate, an activity in which "there is profit even in defeat."

The second phase in the history of the composition of the *Oration* – I surmise – consists in the addition of a defence of philosophy and the contemplative life (*Oration* §§142–50). The addition can be dated to the middle of October 1486 and is contemporary with the letter to Corneus (see the overview of §§142–70), on which it directly depends.[61] This letter reflects Pico's anxiety as the date of the debate approaches, an anxiety that is intensified when Corneus reproaches him for having renounced the active life.

The third phase coincides with Pico's letter of 12 November to Girolamo Benivieni, in which he himself states that he added the passage "de pace" ["on peace"] (*Oration* §§88–97). He also adds about two hundred theses, increasing their total number to nine hundred.

The fourth phase consists of the detailed defence of his work, with particular attention to his wide range of sources (magic, the Cabala, etc.). This important expansion can be dated to his time in Rome.[62] The second part of the *Oration* is now practically self-standing and easily transformed into the *Apologia*, which Pico wrote quickly, drawing on the *Oration* itself, and published in May 1487. This is the only part of the *Oration*, one could say, whose publication Pico personally oversaw. Thus, the *Apologia*, together with P, lends fundamental insights into the accuracy of R.[63]

This hypothesis also permits us to recognize the diverse meanings that Pico progressively attributed to the *Oration* and consequently also the *Theses*. He began with the justification of philosophy as a calling set within a mystical conception of human dignity, which is conceived as a threefold itinerary as represented in the principal traditions. To this end, he developed a methodology for his philosophical endeavour that comprised a thorough knowledge of the sources in consideration of the "immensitas" of Truth and the opportunity for debate.

The original plan, however, rapidly became complicated. On the one hand, Pico discovered more clearly the theological and perhaps ecclesiological importance of his enterprise, and decided to return to the *Oration* in order to bestow on it this meaning as well (the fragment "de pace" introduced in mid-November). On the other hand, it soon became the target of objections (evident in his reply to Andrea Corneus in mid-October), which became serious accusations after the publication of the *Conclusiones* in Rome. As a result, Pico was forced to defend himself by attenuating the *Oration*'s controversial tone and softening it with conciliatory passages.

In spring 1487, Pico ultimately put aside the original nucleus of the *Oration* and preserved only those parts useful for his self-defence against the accusations of heterodoxy.

(Translation by Michael Papio and Sarah Christopher.)

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1 The documents were collected by M. Del Piazzo (1963, 271–90), but Berti (1859) is still useful, as is De Lubac (1977, 398ff.).

2 Del Piazzo (1963, 279).

3 Del Piazzo (1963, 276).

4 Del Piazzo (1963, 274).

5 Del Piazzo (1963, 280).

6 Del Piazzo (1963, 277).

7 Del Piazzo (1963, 281).

8 Del Piazzo (1963, 284). On account of an ironic comment made by Pico’s colleague Guglielmo Raimondo de Moncada, known as Flavius Mithridates, it was thought that Margherita was not the only woman enamoured of Pico. Nevertheless, this was an extreme case.

9 Del Piazzo (1963, 277). According to Stefano Taverna, “they cut about fourteen of the count’s men to pieces and wounded him as well” (“hanno tagliato a pezi circha 14 di quelli del conte e luy ferito”). According to Guidoni, “even Signor Giovanni’s servants killed some of them in the brawl” (“la famiglia del signor Zohanne nella zuffa, pur amazorno anchora lor qualche uno”).

10 By 12 May, Guidoni had already surmised that, although the Count would not face negative consequences, “the secretary will come to a bad end because it is believed that he was a rogue and the source of all the trouble” (“’l canzelero ne farà male, perché è reputato che ’l fusse uno capestro, da cui sia processo ogni male”). See Del Piazzo (1963, 280).

11 Del Piazzo (1963, 282).

12 Del Piazzo (1963, 284).

13 This phrase is used several times in the letter of the Signoria of Arezzo to Lorenzo in the description of the incident. Cf. Del Piazzo (1963, 274–

75).

14 Del Piazzo (1963, 280).

15 That is, a colour between red and black, and denoting inferior quality.

16 Del Piazzo (1963, 285).

17 Flavius Mithridates writes: “On account of his [Pico’s] handsomeness, women nowadays compete with one another to be with him, especially Margherita, whom some man is willing to take tomorrow to Rome, should Pico so desire, though she may be pregnant.” [Hodie propter cuius pulchritudinem mulieres concurrunt ut coeant secum, precipue Margarita quam unus se offert homo mane ducere eam usque Romam si voluerit Picus quamvis sit praegnans] (Cod. Vat. Ebr. [Vatican Hebrew Codices] fol. 157r). Cf. Wirszubski (1989, 17–18). Mithridates was writing while in Rome at the end of 1486. Hence, strictly speaking, one cannot confirm, as does Zambelli, that the woman was pregnant when Pico kidnapped her (Zambelli 1995, 11). The comments in the margins of the text are of great interest not only for dating the translations but also for understanding the figure of Margherita and the very special relationship she had with Pico. Mithridates jokingly writes about Pico several times regarding his real abilities as a literary interpreter (“Pico, do you think you can understand without Mithridates?” [“putasne Pice sine Mithridate intelligere posse?”], (Wirszubski 1989, 72); his wealth (“if Pico were poor, he wouldn’t get such honours from Rome” [“si Picus esset pauper tot honores Romae non haberet”] (Wirszubski 1989, 16); and the unfortunate outcome of his undertaking in Rome, alluding to the pope and the cardinals (“Pico was put in gaol in Castel Sant’Angelo because he wished to reveal secrets that wisemen concealed in mystery and that are not to be given away to asses” [“Picus est carceratus in castri Sancti Angeli quia voluit revelare secreta non revelanda asinis que non sine misterio occultarunt sapientes”] (Wirszubski 1989, 17). He also alludes to what occurred between Pico and Margherita (“And this is the field where acts of illicit intercourse and turpitude took place, near Lucignano, where Pico was caught with Margherita” [“Et hic est ager in quo reuelantur turpitudines et fiunt coitus

illiciti prope Lucinianum ubi captus fuit picus cum margarita”] (Wirszubski 1989, 17). Flavius Mithridates expected to be able to return to Rome (“Think about it, Pico, and you’ll understand. I won’t teach you unless I go back to the city” [“Vide Pice et intellege. Ego autem noli tibi expondere nisi rediero ad urbem”] (Wirszubski 1989, 72). He also has other requests: only if a (or the) “handsome boy” arrives will he teach Pico the Aramaic language (“which Pico would never know if not for the arrival of a [or the] *na’ar iafe* [handsome boy]” [“quam numquam Picus sciet nisi venerit naar iafe”] (Wirszubski 1989, 72–73). B. Schefer, in his recent edition of the *Theses* (Pico 1999, 258), indicates, following Kieszkowski (in Pico 1973, 52), that “dominum naris” [lord of the nose], which refers to God, in the fortieth thesis according to the opinion of the cabalists (1.28.40), could be assonantal with *na’ar*. It is not certain, however, that Pico read these notes, which are datable to the end of 1486 or to 1487. It was probably because of the erratic personality of his colleague, though he was also fond of Pico and hard-working, that Pico excluded the mention of Flavius Mithridates from the definitive edition of the *Oration.*

18 According to F. Bausi’s recent, well-argued thesis (Bausi 1998b, 7–57), the letter to Lorenzo de’ Medici can be dated to July 1486. The Capponi manuscript dates the letter “florentie, idibus iuliis 1486” (that is, 15 July 1486), and one may assume that Gianfrancesco backdated his letter to 1484 in order to avoid showing that Giovanni Pico was still interested in vernacular poetry during a period in which he should have been otherwise occupied. Pico, like Poliziano in his *Nutricia*, would have praised, even if merely out of gratitude, Lorenzo de’ Medici’s *Comento de’ miei sonetti*, which was then the model for Pico’s contemporary *Commento sopra una canzona de amore*. Consequently, there would then be continuity and coherence between the letter to Lorenzo and the attention that was dedicated to rhetoric in the *Oration*, a subject to which we shall return shortly.

19 On Pico’s letters, see Garin (1961, 261). I am reading Pico’s letter according to the edition of the *Opera omnia* in Pico (1971, 1:367–68), keeping in mind the Bolognese incunabulum of 1496, except for those letters published by Leon Dorez (1895, 353–59).

20 Cf. Piemontese (1996).

21 *Opera omnia* (Pico 1971, 1:367–68). Ficino's letter is in Ficino (1937, 1:34–35).

22 Cf. Pico (1971, *Opera omnia* 1:367).

23 On these problematic authors, see Zambelli (1995, 28–29).

24 "This I know: Plotinus has not left my thoughts. Not only do I have his works at hand, but I feel obliged to study him as well. I have always admired him just as I do now" ["Hoc scio, non excidisse mihi Plotinum, quem non in manibus habendum modo, sed discendum adeo mihi, et semper censui, et nunc quoque censeo"], Pico (1971, *Opera omnia* 1:368).

25 To be compared with Rom. 8:18–19: "For I reckon that the sufferings of this time are not worthy to be compared with the glory to come, that shall be revealed in us. For the expectation of the creature waiteth for the revelation of the sons of God" (cf. 1 Cor. 11:7: "vir imago et gloria Dei est" ["Man … is the image and glory of God"]). F. Bacchelli also turned his attention to this passage (with results as yet unpublished), as has S. A. Farmer: the concluding section of the nine hundred theses "contains his grand plan for the conversion of the Jews, last item on the medieval agenda before the coming of the millennium" (Farmer 1998, 42–43).

26 Cf. the final passage of the *Commento sopra una canzona de amore* ("Fu opinione degli antiqui teologi non si dovere temerariamente publicare le cose divine e' secreti misterii," in Pico 1942, 580–81): "It was the opinion of the ancient theologians that one should not rashly make public the secret mysteries of theology" (Jayne trans. in Pico 1984, 169). This passage will be included in the *Oration*, applied only to the Cabala. Farmer speaks about the contrast between Pico's "eagerness to reveal his hard-won knowledge and his equally strong hesitations to do so" (Farmer 1998, 71).

27 “I am hurrying towards Rome where my studies are endangered, or rather where I have put them in danger. If I am successful, it is thanks to God, His glory and His grace. Should I fail, only my own ignorance is to blame” [“Romam propero ubi de nostris studiis periculum, vel cum pericolo faciemus. Si quid profecerimus, dei est munus, illi laudes et gratiae. Si quid defecerimus, nostra est imbecillitas nobis imputata”]. See Pico (1971, *Opera omnia* 1:366). He speaks of it again in letter 42 to Domenico Benivieni (Pico 1971, 1:382).

28 This is the hypothesis of Farmer, author of a recent and important edition of the nine hundred theses, who notes that the phrase “in apostolico senatu” (“in the apostolic senate”) is missing in the *Apologia* (which Pico wrote a few months after the failure of the debate in Rome) and that Pico speaks of a debate “inter paucos et doctos secreto congressu” (“among few learned men, convened privately”). See Farmer (1998, 4–9).

29 In all probability, this is the Latin poem *Ad Deum deprecatio ut bella tollat, quae per totam fremunt Italiam*; see Bausi (1996, 95–96). The identification of the *Oration on the Dignity of Man* with the *Carmen pro pace* is incorrect.

30 Dorez (1895, 357–58).

31 Cf. Pico (1971, 378–79).

32 Garin (1961, 262).

33 Ficino (1937, 1:56–57).

34 So I understand his note on Habacuc 3:2: “‘In medio annorum suorum vivifica illud’: scilicet in medio illius margaritae (Qualis est Pici) generantis annos vivifica illud” [“‘In the midst of one’s years, bring it to life’: that is, in the midst of that year-giving *margarita* (like Pico’s), bring it to life”]. The comment is in the margin of §49 of the edition edited by Gershom Scholem (1980, 50), which speaks of a precious stone, the tenth sephira,

loved by a king. It speaks of precious stone (*margarita*), light, sun, day, and year (Gen. 1:3,15); this is why "in the midst of the years" is tantamount to "in the midst of the *margarita*." The allusions are unclear. Chaim Wirszubski (1989, 204–5) recalls that J. Gaffarel, in his *Codicum Cabalisticorum Index* (1651), recounts having held in his hands a translation of Recanati's *Commentary on the Pentateuch*, in which there appeared, written by Mithridates in the second half of 1486, the names of Giovanni Pico and Margherita, with evident signs that someone had attempted to rub them out, an event that could only point to Pico himself.

35 Pico (1997, 92). And again, on Psalm 11, "quoniam qui se Dei legem custodire fatentur, ad hippochrisim lapsi, humanis divina confunduntur, et inanibus caeremoniis freti, verum Dei cultum profanaverunt, simplices, puros et spiritu pauperes corruperunt […] Veros adoratores in spiritu et veritate orare oportere" ["For those who profess to be guardians of God's law, having lapsed into hypocrisy, confuse divine things with the human and, relying on meaningless ceremonies, render profane the true worship of God. They have corrupted those who are simple, pure and poor in spirit. […] True worshipers must pray in spirit and in truth"] (Pico 1997, 116).

36 Cf. Bori (1996a).

37 Giovan Francesco Pico (1963, 74). Cf. De Lubac (1977, 420–21).

38 "Commentariolum nostrum non est quod admireris, ociosi cum esse voluimus, et omnino nihil agere, id egimus, animum remittentes potius quam intendentes. Omnino praeludium est commentariorum, quae in Platonis Symposium meditamur. Erit in illis quod tu saltem ames et laudes, qui omnia nostra amas et laudas. […] Ex Fracta 10 Novembris 1486" [I wrote the little commentary of mine that you admire when I wished to relax and to do absolutely nothing so as to refresh my mind rather than to exert it. It is only a prelude to the commentary I am planning to write on Plato's *Symposium*, in which there will be something for you, who in any event love and praise all my works, to love and praise] (Pico 1971, 1:382).

39 Instead of "rimanersi," I choose "rimuovere," from the Giunta edition published in Florence in 1519.

40 *Commento sopra una canzona de amore* (Pico 1942, 578).

41 Pico (1942, 537–38).

42 The earthly Venus is human love; the heavenly Venus, divine love (see Pausanias 180c–185c). See Panofsky (1962, 140ff.).

43 Another difference with respect to Marsilio Ficino could perhaps depend on the same experience, which Pico affirms "che in Dio non sia bellezza, perché la bellezza include in sé qualche imperfezione" ("beauty is not in God, because beauty contains in itself some imperfection"). See *Commento* (Pico 1942, 495); cf. Toussaint (1989, 56–57).

44 Wind (1968, 46ff.).

45 Cf. Pico, *Commento* (1942, 509). "Letizia" ["happiness"] is mentioned, but does not pertain to the three graces.

46 Cf. Panofsky (1972, 191ff.).

47 Dionisotti (1968) reflected much on this theme. Stéphane Toussaint speaks of "bilinguismo filosofico di Pico, da un lato avvolto nei misteri della Qabbala e delle teologie poetiche, dall'altro esposto alla cruda luce di una ragione che osava criticare l'astrologia così cara al Ficino" ["Pico's philosophical bilingualism, on the one hand wrapped in the mysteries of the Cabala and in poetic theologies and, on the other hand, exposed to the harsh light of reason that dared to criticize the astrology that was so dear to Ficino"] (Toussaint 1998, 3).

48 Hence, that *secundum* "according to," which quite frequently distinguishes the *Conclusiones*: *according to* Aquinas; *according to* Duns

Scotus; *according to* Plato, Aristotle, the theology of the ancients, the Chaldeans, and others. I owe this important observation to Carlo Ginzburg.

49 Pico (1971, *Opera omnia* 1:385). Here there is probably an allusion to Mercury's petasus, and to Pico's role as mystagogue and a new Hermes (Bori 2000, 57n67).

50 See the letter from Fratta to Girolamo Benivieni (Dorez 1895, 358).

51 Perhaps Pico had in mind the inspired writer of Ps. 44.2: "Eructavit cor meum verbum bonum […] lingua mea calamus scribae velociter scribentis" ["My heart hath uttered a good word […]. My tongue is the pen of a scrivener that writeth swiftly."]. In his *Vita*, Giovan Francesco Pico (1963, 22) mentions Giovanni's "nimia in commentando velocitas" ["exceptional speed in glossing"].

52 "Omnia vastantur, omnia ferrum corripit, omne/iam latus Ausoniae fremit armis" ["Everything is laid waste, the sword destroys all, all of Ausonia already roars in battle"] in Kristeller (1965, 1:99). It should be noted that the last verse, "iungant caesa fodera porca" ["the parties come together with the immolated sow"], is echoed in the *Oration*, §89: "quippe quae cesa utraque bestia, quasi icta porca, inviolabile inter carnem et spiritum foedus sanctissimae pacis sanciet" ["indeed, both beasts having been sacrificed like a stuck sow, it will ratify an everlasting pact of the most holy peace between the flesh and the spirit"], and also, in an analogous context, the fragment "de pace quaedam," which he speaks of in the letter to Benivieni of 12 November 1486. In 1486, the marquisate of Saluzzo is occupied by Charles I of Savoy. Duke Alfonso of Calabria, allied with the Orsini against the Colonna, who are on the side of Innocent VIII, invades the papal territories.

53 Ceretti (1878).

54 See the episode narrated by Giorgio Merula in a letter written around 1483. He remembers how he had visited Mirandola a little less than twenty

years before, deviating from his route toward Bologna. Giovanni Pico's mother, Giulia Boiardo, was alone with her three children, Caterina, Lucrezia, and Giovanni, because her husband, Giovanni Francesco, was at war in Calabria. Giorgio Merula recalls how the nurse, bringing Giovanni, who had just been born a little while before, into the dining room, jokingly asked: "What shall we do with this baby?" "Arma an litteras sequetur"? ["Will he be a soldier or a scholar?"]. Merula adds that the nurse guessed perfectly (Dorez 1895, 356). Gianfrancesco affirms in the *Vita* that Giovanni "odiava la milizia secolare e il vincolo della vita coniugale" ["hated the secular militia and the ties of married life"], and the first even more than the second (G. F. Pico 1963, 72).

55 Giovan Francesco Pico (1963, 40–42). Sorbelli here translates "simultas" as "smarrimento" ("confusion"), whereas he had translated it just before (ibid., 36–37) as "animosità" ("animosity").

56 The combative but often inadequate study of W. G. Craven (1981), however, constitutes an introduction to the historiographical debate around Pico and especially around the *Oration.*

57 See also Reinhardt's "*De illis Pici vestigiis quae in regno theologiae […] supersunt*" (1994). Among those who continued this tradition are Dulles (1941), Di Napoli (1965), and Roulier (1989).

58 See the letter to Ficino in *Opera omnia* (Pico 1971, 367) ("[…] in quibus et illa quoque, quae apud Graecos mendosa et mutila circumferuntur, leguntur integra et absoluta" ["[…] there [in their homeland] and in the works [of the Chaldeans], which are circulated among the Greeks in a defective and damaged state, [the Oracles] are read whole and complete"]) and the *Oration*: "Quando permulti hique pretiosiores eorum libri ad nostros nullo interprete pervenerunt, et horum qui pervenerunt tum plures perverterunt potius quam converterint illi interpretes, tum certe omnibus eam caliginem obscuritatis offuderunt, ut quae apud suos facilia, nitida et expedita sunt, apud nostros scrupea facta laciniosa studiosorum conatum eludant plurimum atque frustrentur" ["When these far more precious books of theirs came to us without translation, many of them were too corrupt for

the translators to repair. It is certain that at that point they were darkened by the shadows of obscurity such that what was easy, clear and free to them became among us difficult and thorny subjects that eluded many scholars and frustrated their attempts to unravel them"] (in Garin 1961, 239).

59 I owe to Franco Bacchelli, to whom I am very grateful, the important information that the copy of the *Oration* contained in the Palatino 885 manuscript was written by Giovanni Nesi, the author of the *Oraculum de novo saeculo* (1497), pronounced from the grave by Giovanni Pico. On this "familiare di Marsilio Ficino e devoto di Frate Girolamo" ["relative of Marsilio Ficino and devotee of Brother Girolamo"], see Vasoli (1997, 68), who defines him precisely in this way. The edition of the *Oraculum* begins on p. 110. On Nesi, see also Walker (1972, 51–58). In a singular fusion of prophetism and hermeticism, the *Oraculum* exalts in Savonarola, in the voice of Giovanni Pico, the complete realization of a Gnostic-prophetic ideal, whose greatest prototype for Nesi had been precisely Giovanni Pico, in particular with his *Oration*. In an initial comparison between the *Oration* and the *Oraculum*, one's attention is particularly drawn to the portrait of Savonarola, possessor of the "multiplex philosophia" ("multifaceted philosophy") that stretches upward to "theologia domina" ("Lady Theology") at the top of Jacob's ladder; see *Oraculum*, 40v–41r (in Vasoli 1977, 114). "Multiplex philosophia" is also in 73r, 126 (see *Oration* §§87–97), and on Christ "tam benigne vocantem" ["so gently called"] (73r, in Vasoli 1977, 126; cf. *Oration* §18 R, "Tam blande vocati, tam benigniter invitati" ["so gently called, so calmly invited"], with the same evangelical reference: ["Come to me"] Matt. 11:28). Nesi's interest in the *Oration* was not casual since he copied at an earlier time a defective version, then put it aside in order to draw on the *Oration* for his *Oraculum de novo saeculo*, which had just been published by Gianfrancesco.

60 Around 5,000 characters compared with 28,000 in R, which as a whole contains around 52,000 characters.

61 Pico writes to Corneus: "Exitialis haec illa est et monstrosa persuasio, quae hominum mentes invasit, aut non esse philosophiae studia viris principibus attingenda, aut summis labiis ad pompam potius ingenii, quam

animi cultum vel ociose etiam delibanda. Omnino illud Neoptolemi habent pro decreto, aut nil philosophandum, aut paucis […] ergo vicio alicui vertetur, et virtutem ipsam virtutis gratia nil, extra eam quaerens perpetuo affectet et prosequatur quod divina mysteria, naturae consilia perscrutans, hoc perfruatur ocio, caeterarum rerum despector et negligens, quando illa possunt sectatorum suorum vota satis implore. Ergo illiberalem aut non omnino principis erit non mercenarium facere studium sapientiae. Quis aequo animo haec aut ferat aut audiat?" ["Men's minds have been invaded by the ruinous and monstrous conviction that noblemen ought to refrain from philosophical studies or, at most, that they should taste them only with the edge of their lips in order to show off their intelligence rather than putting them into practice, in peace, so as to better themselves. They wholeheartedly consider Neoptolemus's saying as a decree: no one, or just a very few, should engage in philosophy. […] Even the virtue of one who, for love of virtue, seeks nothing other than virtue, lovingly pursues the divine mysteries, fathoms the plans of nature and enjoys this leisure, neglecting and despising all other things, is therefore transformed into some vice even though these things are enough to satisfy the needs of those who pursue them. Would it therefore be ignoble or wholly improper for a nobleman gratuitously to pursue wisdom? Who could hear or tolerate such a thing without irritation?"] (Pico 1971, 1:377). Compare this with the *Oration* (§§153–55): "Ita invasit fere omnium mentes exitialis haec et monstrosa persuasio, aut nihil aut paucis philosophandum. Quasi rerum causas, naturae vias, universi rationem, Dei consilia, caelorum terraeque mysteria, pre oculis, pre minibus exploratissima habere nihil sit prorsus, nisi vel gratiam inde aucupari aliquam, vel lucrum sibi comparare possit. Qui eo deventum est ut iam (proh dolor!) non existimentur sapientes nisi qui mercennarium faciunt studium sapientiae" ["Thus, nearly everyone's mind has been invaded by the ruinous and monstrous conviction that either no one or only a very few may study philosophy. As if having before our eyes and at our fingertips the causes of things, the ways of nature, the logic of the universe, the divine plan and the mysteries of Heaven and Earth were a thing of very little worth, unless accompanied by the possibility of garnering some favour or making a profit. Instead, it has now reached the point (what sorrow!) where only those who reduce the study of wisdom to a business are considered wise"]. Cf. Bori (2000, 73–75).

62 Bausi (1996, 111) indicates as *terminus a quo* 7 December 1486, the publication of the *Theses*, and as *terminus ante quem* 20 February 1487, when it was clear that the debate would not take place because Innocent VIII prohibited it and called a committee of inquiry.

63 Given that it is possible to compare R (1496) with P (1486) for the first part and with the *Apologia* (1487) for the second part, eventual minor editorial interventions not by Giovanni but by Gianfrancesco Pico do not emerge, in my opinion, as a subsequent phase in the history of the draft (Bori 2000, 82–83).

Chronology

Francesco Borghesi

1463

On 24 February, Giovanni Pico dei Conti di Mirandola e Concordia was born in the castle of Mirandola. On that day – according to the tale related by his nephew Gianfrancesco – a circle of fire appeared for a split second over his mother's bed. Of his two sisters, Caterina and Lucrezia, the first married Lionello Pio da Carpi in 1473 and the second Pino Oderlaffi da Forlì in 1475. His brothers, Galeotto and Anton Maria, were perpetually fighting over the estate, nurturing a family feud that would one day cost Gianfrancesco his life.

Giovanni's father died soon after his birth, and he was raised by his mother, Giulia Boiardo, who wanted him to pursue an ecclesiastical career.

1477

Pico departed for Bologna at the age of fourteen to study canon law in accordance with the wishes of his mother, who died in August 1478.

1479

Uninterested in the political and financial squabbles that divided his brothers after his mother's death, Pico decided to pursue activities that were more in line with his own budding interests. In late May, he found himself in Ferrara, where he began to study philosophy at the faculty of arts and

also to learn ancient Greek. It was in Ferrara that Pico met two important figures: Battista Guarini, who later became his teacher, and Girolamo Savonarola, whom Pico impressed with his erudition in the public debate that, as protonotary, he held with Lorenzo Nogarola.

1480

Fifteen months later, in 1480, Pico, barely eighteen, was in Padua, broadening his knowledge of philosophy at what was then Italy's most famous university. He remained there for two academic years, making important contacts and studying Aristotle and his commentators, especially Averroes. It was this discovery of Arabo-Judaic thought that led to his close ties to a group of intellectuals who were actively disseminating such ideas throughout Italy, including Girolamo Ramusio and, particularly, Elia del Medigo.

Another noteworthy individual whom Pico met in Padua was the Aristotelian Nicoletto Vernia, a scholar of Averroes who, unlike Elia del Medigo, could only read his works in Latin translation.

1482

Pico spent the summer of 1482 in his castle in Mirandola, departing in the fall for Pavia, where he decided to dedicate himself to the study of philosophy, Greek, and rhetoric. There he also studied late Aristotelian texts, such as those of the *calculatores* (the students and theorists of logic and language and some of the followers of Richard Swineshead, the fourteenth-century theological master at Oxford). Pico's reading of the *calculatores* is still evident in one of his late works, the *Disputationes adversus astrologiam divinatricem*.

Through Angelo Poliziano, whom he met in Mantua in 1472, Pico began to take an interest in the Florentine literary movement; indeed, it was then that he asked Marsilio Ficino for a copy of his *Theologia Platonica*. Once

again, under the influence of Elia del Medigo, he read and meditated on the work of John Philoponus and revised the amorous lyrics that he had begun composing several years earlier.

1483

In 1483, an agreement on the division of the family estate having been reached between his brothers, Pico at the age of twenty became one of the wealthiest men in Italy and free from all petty worries.

While dedicating himself to philosophy in Padua and Pavia, Pico had carried on with his poetry. In May, he sent some of his compositions to Poliziano, who subsequently invited him to Florence. A new and decisive stage in the intellectual life of the Count of Mirandola and Concordia was initiated in the city of Lorenzo the Magnificent.

1484

In 1484, Pico read the *Theologia Platonica* of Ficino, who later recalled how Pico, seized by enthusiasm, had forced him to tackle Plotinus shortly after he had published his translation of Plato. Nevertheless, Pico took pains to assure his friends that he had not deserted the Aristotelian school but was simply an explorer (*explorator*) of new territory who was still dedicated to the ideas of the ancients. A crowd of various characters gathered around Pico: physicians and Jewish philosophers, Aristotelians, Platonists, and poets, as well as scholars of Dante and Petrarch. Chief among all these relationships was the protective and generous friendship of Lorenzo de' Medici. Even Elia del Medigo followed Pico to Florence, where he continued to work for him, translating from Hebrew Averroes's paraphrase of Plato's *Republic* as well as some of his logical *quaestiones*. One of Ficino's letters likewise informs us that Elia often held debates in Pico's house on philosophical and religious matters with another converted Jew, Guglielmo Raimondo de Moncada, also known as Flavius Mithridates. The latter soon began teaching Hebrew to Pico, who was impatient to learn the language of the Bible. It appears that Mithridates was a rather peculiar

character with a difficult personality. In fact, he once demanded that Pico, if he wished to continue his lessons in Aramaic (Pico’s “Chaldean”), serve as a go-between with a youth from Faenza called Lancillotto, whom Mithridates desired as a lover.

1485

Emphasis is often placed on Giovanni Pico’s “official” entrance on the Italian cultural scene in 1485 with his polemic against Ermolao Barbaro, who taught Aristotle in Padua. Toward the end of 1482, Pico wrote Barbaro a letter expressing his admiration for the man’s learning and his own regret that he had not had a chance to meet him during his sojourn in Padua (Barbaro had been in Venice at the time). The two began exchanging letters, which led to Barbaro’s critique of the so-called barbarous philosophers, who used plain, overly technical, and dry language. Nowadays, Pico’s response, in the celebrated letter entitled *De genere dicendi philosophorum*, is viewed as one of the greatest examples of Renaissance rhetoric. In it Pico proclaims that philosophical research need not conform to a single, harmonious style if such an approach impedes the pursuit of truth.

Pico likewise dealt with the relationship between content and form in a long missive to Lorenzo the Magnificent, praising him for a collection of poems written in the vernacular. Having exalted the poetic works of the young prince, Pico set up a comparison between Dante and Petrarch. Inasmuch as Petrarch was lacking in content and Dante in form, the author of the letter clearly expressed his preference for Dante. Indeed, Petrarch comes across as a virtuoso, an artist, but not as a thinker; he was too self-satisfied, whereas Dante, who exhibited a very different nature, presented his material with great vigour. Initially fascinating, Petrarch’s poetry ultimately proved less satisfying than Dante’s profundity. Pico’s argument appeared to be based on the philosophical leanings of all three authors. Pico praised Lorenzo not so much for his poetry, however, as for his ability to expound Aristotle’s *Physics*, *Ethics*, and *De anima* and the ideas of the Platonists. In addition, Pico laid stress on the analytical aspects of Lorenzo’s annotations in prose that appeared in the margins of his sonnets, which were meant not so much to delight as to heighten consciousness.

1485–1486

Constantly on the move, Pico appeared in Paris in July 1485 at the Sorbonne, where he remained until the beginning of the following year. Although information on this period is scarce, the experience of studying in the most important university in the world was no doubt a positive one, so much so that Pico often boasted of his skill at using the disputative style of the "*celebratissimorum Parisiensium disputatorum*." It is not unreasonable to assume that it was in Paris that Pico came up with the idea of putting his own philosophical and theological positions – as well as his political project – to the test in a public debate, even though such an event would have differed from traditional university debates in scope and significance.

1486

Pico's reentry into Florence marked what could be called the most tormented period of his brief life. In fact, 1486 was an extraordinary year for the young scholar. Having just completed his studies in Paris, the twenty-three-year-old returned in March to Florence, where he stayed among his friends (Lorenzo de' Medici, Angelo Poliziano, Marsilio Ficino, and Girolamo Benivieni) until 8 May, when he left for Rome. Two days later, he caused a remarkable scandal in Arezzo when he attempted to abduct Margherita, wife of Giuliano di Mariotto de' Medici, from her home. Distraught by the experience, he retired to Perugia, whence he proceeded to Fratta on account of the plague. There he finally managed, through work and penitence, to overcome the bitterness and shame of the deplorable affair.

He wrote a commentary on a *canzone* written by his friend Girolamo Benivieni, collected nine hundred theses, or *Conclusiones*, meant to be discussed at a conference on philosophical peace that was to be held in Rome in January 1487 (to which scholars would be invited at his own expense), and composed an introductory *Oration* to the *Conclusiones*. By 7 December, he was in Rome, where the *Conclusiones* were set in print. At this point, another scandal erupted: the commission appointed to examine

the theses condemned some of them, and Pope Innocent VIII cancelled the upcoming conference. Pico defended himself in the *Apologia*, into which he incorporated large sections of the *Oration*. By this time, however, the momentous year of 1486 had drawn to a close.

1487

It is clear that Pico felt he had much to offer to the Church of Rome and believed that his theorizing in no way ran counter to the principles of Christian theology. Fortified by these convictions and by the confidence of youth, Pico rededicated himself to the preparation of the Roman event.

By November 1486, the *Conclusiones* had been prepared. The text was published on 7 December in Rome at the press of Eucharius Silber. Pico, as stated previously, invited theologians and philosophers for the days following the Epiphany of 1487. Nevertheless, his arrival in Rome was immediately complicated by voices of dissent that definitively convinced the pope to suspend the debate. The papal brief, *Cum injunctio nobis*, of 20 February 1487, encharged Giovanni Monisart, Bishop of Tournai, with the task of organizing a commission of seven bishops (among whom was Pedro Garcia), two generals of religious orders, and eight theologians and canons. The commission convened from the second to the thirteenth of March 1487. Pico was present at the debate, but only for the first five days. After that, he was no longer allowed to participate. Seven theses were immediately condemned, then another six. After a more thorough analysis, the first seven were condemned absolutely, while the other six were only censored. The secretaries of the trial, Johannes Cordier, a theologian from the Sorbonne, and the ailing Marco de Miroldo, were not favourably disposed to Pico.

Exasperated and convinced of the correctness of his own reasoning, Pico quickly drafted an apologia in which he treated and clarified the thirteen contested theses. Once again, the effect was not what he had hoped for, and the Roman Curia viewed the publication of the *Apologia* on 31 May 1487 as an act of insubordination. In a brief dated 6 June, Innocent VIII

summoned the tribunal of the Inquisition, and on 31 July Giovanni signed an act of submission that granted permission for the copies of the *Conclusiones* to be burned at the stake, but the bull *Et si injuncto nobis*, dated 4 August, absolved him personally of all condemnation. It is interesting that the bull was not publicized until 15 December, together with the warrant for his arrest. Pico saw no alternative but to flee from Rome.

1488

Pico was seized at the beginning of 1488 between Grenoble and Lyon, whence he was escorted to Paris under the supervision of papal nuncios. All the same, he was protected by the king, who confined him in the castle of Vincennes lest he be turned over to the Vatican. In the end, Pico was able to leave France unharmed, thanks to a special royal permit. He returned to Florence in April of the same year.

After Pico returned to Florence, we come across another erudite Jew, R. Yohanan Alemanno, a physician raised in Tuscany in a family of bankers. Many scholars consider Alemanno one of the most widely learned Jewish intellectuals among Pico’s circle of collaborators, capable, among other things, of reading Arabic sources in Hebrew. Pico found himself writing his commentary on the Song of Songs in a thoroughly homogeneous intellectual climate: Ficino had written his commentary on Plato’s *Symposium* and Girolamo Benivieni his *Canzone d’amore*, afterward annotated by Pico.

1489

With his return to Florence, Pico entered an extremely productive period that would result in the publication of the *Heptaplus* and *De ente et uno* as well as the composition of the *Disputationes adversus astrologiam divinatricem* and the great moral letters to his nephew Gianfrancesco. Most likely, this new impetus in his studies was motivated by his need to overcome the bitter vicissitudes of Rome and perhaps also by his desire for spiritual redemption. Both in a letter to Andrea Corneus of 1489 and in the

preface to the *Heptaplus*, he announced that he was working on a systematic commentary on the Psalms, which, however, he never carried to completion. The *Heptaplus* came out in print in summer 1489 and was financed by Roberto Salviati. The idea behind this work is that “the seven days of creation” contain all of nature’s secrets and that in his books Moses had revealed all of human wisdom and all that the spirit of God had told him.

In this same period, Pico also conceived and wrote *De ente et uno*, which circulated in Florence in manuscript form. This work was dedicated by Pico to his friend Poliziano, who had insistently asked him to intervene in a dispute between the Platonists – in the persons of Lorenzo de’ Medici and Marsilio Ficino – and the Peripatetics or those who, like Poliziano, had always studied the texts of Aristotle. In reality, Pico seemed to disagree with the very principles of the debate and used the invitation as an occasion to articulate in public his theories on concord. To set Plato against Aristotle had long been one of the most arduous intellectual tasks, so much so that the ideology of humanism had come up with two diverse cultural strategies for dealing with, and certainly two different models of understanding, the two philosophers. Pico did not succeed in bringing the enterprise to a conclusion, but he left in *De ente et uno* a very interesting model of how he would have proceeded.

Final Years

In 1492, Giovanni wrote important moral letters to his nephew Gianfrancesco, the first from Ferrara, dated 15 May, and the second written on 2 July, which was followed by a third on 27 November. In these letters, Pico laid out the balance of existence itself and attempted to summarize all its precepts: it was not the world that was the adversary here but those things in it, such as ignorance, insanity, and greed, that needlessly wear out man’s soul. One had to know how to liberate oneself from these afflictions. This, essentially, was his advice to his nephew.

In the final years of his life, Pico seems to have directed his intellectual energy toward theological and spiritual studies, the mystery of life and grace, and the figure of the cross. He followed the sermons of Savonarola, toward whose arrival in Florence he himself had contributed. Pico’s final work was conceived in the silence and solitude of his villa in Fiesole. This was the unfinished *Disputationes adversus astrologiam divinatricem*, the most comprehensive of all his projects. Published posthumously by his nephew Gianfrancesco in the 1496 edition of Pico’s works, the *Disputationes* did not fail to arouse interest and stimulate much discussion. The subject was at the centre of the period’s cultural debates: Girolamo Savonarola immediately prepared a compendium in Italian, and Giovanni Mainardi and Heinrich Cornelius Agrippa praised it; however, others, such as Giovanni Pontano, Luca Bellanti, Girolamo Torrella, Pietro Pomponazzi, and Jean Bodin, criticized it in various ways, sometimes severely. The *Disputationes* appeared just as interest in astrology was being reawakened.

Death

Giovanni Pico died amid uncertain circumstances in Florence on 17 November 1494, with Girolamo Savonarola at his side. By this point, his estate had been granted to charitable institutions and his nephews, and his well-stocked library to his brother Anton Maria. On the same day, Charles VIII entered Florence.

The *Oration*’s Printed Editions

Michael Papio

Like all great works of philosophy and literature from the past, the *Oration on the Dignity of Man* has a publication history that reflects the importance accorded to it by its readers over the course of time. When its themes are of greatest relevance, it appears more frequently in print. A glance at this record for the text from the 1400s to the present reveals two distinct periods of production, separated by three hundred years of “silence.” Between the appearance of the *editio princeps* in 1496 and Heinrich Petri’s 1572–73 reprint of Pico’s *Opera*, the *Oration* appeared ten times in the company of Pico’s other works and once alone. Between 1905 and the publication of the volume you now hold in your hands, it appeared roughly another fifty times, both in the original Latin and in translation into modern languages, including (from the greatest to the fewest in number) Italian, English, Spanish, German, Portuguese, French, Swedish, Danish, Hebrew, Romanian, Catalan, Finnish, Serbo-Croatian, Dutch, Japanese, and Chinese. Naturally, one may expect a work such as this to be rather widespread among the generations immediately following that of its author, but the reasons that lay behind this feverish “rediscovery” in the second half of the twentieth century are not as clear. Perhaps its newfound relevance since the second half of the twentieth century is a response to the violence of war, the philosophical exigencies of human rights and decolonialization, or a combination of these and other motives as well. Whatever the causes, it is undeniably true that there is something in the *Oration* that is pertinent, even necessary, to the thought of our times.

The various phases of the *Oration*’s original composition have been reconstructed by scholars who, though occasionally in disagreement, have succeeded in providing the historical and biographical contexts that

influenced Pico's decisions regarding which elements to include and which to modify or discard altogether.[1] Our purpose in these few pages, however, is to review what took place once the text first appeared in print. Unlike some of his other works, the entire *Oration* was never published during Pico's lifetime.[2] Although parts of it were included in the *Apologia*, it was not until 1496, two years after his uncle's early death, that Gianfrancesco Pico included it in the posthumous *Opera* printed in Bologna by Benedetto (di Ettore) Faelli.[3] In that edition, Gianfrancesco wrote:

> Leges […] orationem elegantissimam, iuvenili quidem alacritate dictatam, sed a doctoribus prae doctrinae et eloquentiae fastigio saepius admiratam; nec te moveat si plurima in eius calce convisuntur quae et in *Apologiae* sunt inserta proemio, quando illud foras publicaverit, hanc domi semper tenuerit, nec nisi amicis comunem fecerit.[4]

> [You will read […] a most elegant oration, dictated in fact with youthful alacrity but very often admired by learned men for the loftiness of its doctrine and eloquence. Do not be put off if much of what is treated at its close is also to be found in the *Apologia*'s proem, for he would have published it had he not kept it private and had he not [already] made it available to his friends.]

This *oratio elegantissima* ("most elegant oration") still had not taken on the title by which we have come to know it.[5] Pico, as far as we know, never gave it a precise name; it has been suggested that he originally intended to call it the *Oratio ad laudes philosophiae* ("Oration in Praise of Philosophy"),[6] but the evidence for this is slight.

Not long after the Bolognese edition of 1496, though we cannot know precisely when,[7] there appeared another publication of Pico's *Opera*, which is no more than a reproduction of the *editio princeps*. Though it, too, bears the colophon of Faelli, scholars have identified it as a product of Jacobino

Suigo and Nicolas Benedict, who had it printed in Lyon.[8] The third instance of the *Oration*'s publication, this time in Venice, dates from 1498 and, with the exception of the order in which some of the works are presented, is essentially the same as the first two. Indeed, although some of the extant copies carry the Bernardino Vitali colophon, others are attributed directly to Faelli. The actual editor, it would seem, was not Vitali (who apparently employed the same character set nowhere else) but Antonio Moretus.[9] The fourth publication of Pico's *Opera* was put together by Jakob Wimpheling and Hieronymus Emser (two men who, curiously, had conflicting views on Lutheranism) and completed in 1504 by Johann Prüss's press in Strasburg. It was in this version that the *Oration* (still called *Oratio quædam elegantissima* in its index) appeared for the first time with the subtitle *de hominis dignitate* ("on the Dignity of Man").[10] It is worth noting that such a title actually refers most precisely only to the first section of the work (§§1–50), while the remainder would in fact seem to be best described as an encomium of philosophy. Two years later, Pico's *Opera* was printed yet again, and in this version, printed in Reggio Emilia by Ludovico Mazzali[11] five months after the press's completion of Guarino Veronese's *Regulae grammaticales*, the *Oration* resumed what had been until then its traditional title. In 1517, the *Oration* was included in the first compilation of the *Opera* to be printed outside of Italy: the Parisian version of Jean Petit.[12] The *Oratio quædam elegantissima* followed on the heels of the *De ente et uno*, just as it had done in all previous versions of Pico's collected works. In 1519, the *Opera* was published again by the Venetian press of Guglielmo da Fontaneto,[13] which in the same year also put out copies of *La uita el transito et gli miraracoli* [sic] *del beatissimo Sancto Hieronymo doctore excellentissimo*, the pseudo-Augustinian *Soliloquia animae ad Deum*, and Priscian's *Grammar* with the glosses of Johannis de Aigre. These titles, and the fact that the pseudo-Cyprian *Carmen de ligno crucis* was presumably bound accidentally within Pico's works, lead one to assume (correctly) that this was no great step forward in Pico studies.

The year 1530, however, marks an interesting moment for the *Oration*, inasmuch as it was printed for the first time independent of Pico's *Opera omnia*, a decision taken much earlier for other works, such as the *Apologia* and the *Epistles*. The place was Basel, Switzerland, and the printer Heinrich

Petri[14] (direct ancestor of the owners of the modern Schwabe publishing house – the oldest still in existence). On the frontispiece of this edition, the *Oration*, which appears with Pico's glosses on Psalm 15 and two other works, bears the impressive title *Oratio de homine Ioannis Pici Mirandulae, ubi sublimiora et sacrae et humanae philosophiae mysteria explicantur* ("Giovanni Pico della Mirandola's Oration on Man, in Which are Explained the Most Sublime Mysteries of Both Sacred and Human Philosophies"). Petri was also responsible for the following edition of the *Oration*, contained in Pico's *Opera* of 1557,[15] for which the publisher this time returned to the 1504 Strasburg edition for its title: *Oratio de hominis dignitate*. This appended phrase is one that has stuck with the work to the present day. Unfortunately, however, Petri took the text from Gianfrancesco's 1496 *editio princeps*, which contained several typographical errors. Despite the fact that many of them were corrected in the *errata corrige* of Pico's nephew, Petri's editors seem not to have noticed. Given the great influence of the Petri editions over the centuries, this is an oversight that produced substantial defects in subsequent editions.[16] Of particular interest to anyone concerned with publishing history is the intriguing tidbit that this is the first edition of the *Opera* to contain Johann Reuchlin's *De arte cabalistica* (*ad intelligenda loca quaedam Pici, magno usui futura lectori* ["for the comprehension of those passages of Pico's that will be of great use to the reader"]). One may well wonder what role Johannes Herold, the volumes' erudite humanist editor, played in this choice. In addition to being responsible for the fourth edition of Petrarch's collected works for Petri in 1554, Herold was a Swiss-German polyglot and editor with a taste for syncretism in his own right. His studies ranged from the Greco-Roman to the medieval, to Italian humanism, to Zoroaster and the Middle East.[17] Essential to a full understanding of the dynamics here in play is the fact that the Basel humanists (such as Reuchlin, Lefèvre, and Beatus Rhenanus, to name but a few) were deeply concerned with Pico and the concept of human dignity. It is by no means a coincidence that Erasmus's language often echoed that of these Basel scholars in their programme of Christian humanism.[18] In Italy, during that same year of 1557, the Milanese editor Girolamo Scoto produced his own edition of Pico's *Opera* in Venice.[19] A musician and bookmaker generally concerned with the texts of Alexander of Aphrodisias (Aristotelian philosopher, fl. 198–211 AD) and Alessandro Achillini (1463–1512,

professor of philosophy at the University of Bologna), Scoto seems to have enjoyed some success with this publication, insofar as the number of his tomes that remain extant is roughly the same as that of Petri. This is a fact that may, however, say more about the eagerness of the reading public of 1557 than about the quality of Scoto's edition. On the frontispiece, the *Oration* is entitled *Oratio quædam elegantissima de Hominis celsitudine & dignitate* ("A Certain Most Elegant Oration on the Excellence and Dignity of Man"), which may suggest some partial influence exercised by (the success of?) the Petri edition. Scoto's edition, despite its claim to present a complete corpus of Pico's work, omits the *Commento* and the *Esposizione*. We owe the final two pre-modern editions of the *Oration* to the Petri publishing house as well. The first of these, published in Basel in 1572–73 by Heinrich Petri, describes the work in both its index and its document header with the title *De hominis dignitate* ("On the Dignity of Man").[20] Worthy of note is the fact that the editors elected to put Pico's works into the first volume and an incomplete collection of his nephew's into the second.[21] Like its 1557 predecessor, this edition also contains Reuchlin's *De arte cabalistica*. The next and last early edition is that of 1601, published in Basel by Sebastian Henricopetri, the son of Petri who, upon being knighted in 1556 by Charles V, had assumed this new cognomen for his descendants.[22]

While the *Oration* was never the most popular among the works selected for publication between the end of the 1400s and the 1900s (this honour belongs to Pico's *Epistles*), its absence from the bibliographic record between 1601 and 1905 is a symptom of the waning interest in Pico's writings as a whole rather than in this specific text. The 1700s produced nearly nothing of particular value in editions of Pico's writings, and the century that followed, in which the publishers' interest turned principally to Pico's neglected works (such as his vernacular and Latin verses and some previously unpublished letters), overlooked the *Oration* altogether. The nineteenth century, however, would indeed prove invaluable for the initial appearance of what we would now call serious scholarship (e.g., Massetani, Di Giovanni, and even Oreglia), which in turn would set the stage for the veritable boom in editions in the twentieth. The first modern translation was published in 1905 in a volume of Pico's selected works edited by Arthur

Liebert, a member, like Cassirer, of the Neo-Kantian Marburger School.[23] Semprini's 1936 study, entitled *La filosofia di Pico della Mirandola*, contained in its appendix the first Italian translation of the *Oration*, unaccompanied by the original text.[24] Herbert Werner Rüssel produced another translation of the work into German in 1940, prefaced it with a brief essay on humanistic theology, and included some of Thomas More's translation of Gianfrancesco's biography (also in German).[25] In that same year, Charles Glenn Wallis published his own translation, under the title *The Very Elegant Speech on the Dignity of Man*,[26] the first to appear in English and one in which the historical uncertainty of the title is visible. Indeed, in this initial edition, reproduced from typewritten copy, we read: "The first translation into this language of *Oratio elegantissima de dignitate hominis*." Wallis, poet and translator of Latin, Greek, and French, had already prepared English versions of works by Baudelaire, Plato, Porphyry, Kepler, Copernicus, and Grosseteste before turning his hand to Pico. In 1941, Bruno Cicognani's translation appeared,[27] followed a year later by that of Eugenio Garin,[28] whose text was used by Elizabeth Livermore Forbes in her translation of selected passages from the *Oration* in *The Journal of the History of Ideas* 3 (1942): 347–54. Forbes went on to publish a complete translation of the work in 1948 for the very widely circulated volume of Cassirer, Kristeller, and Randall entitled *The Renaissance Philosophy of Man*.[29] Thus, in this short war-torn span of about twelve years (1936–48), the *Oration* – after having lain nearly untouched for three centuries – was translated three times into Italian, twice into English, and once into German. The third English translation, that of Robert Caponigri, appeared in 1956.[30] The Wallis-Forbes-Caponigri triad of English editions has been reprinted since then in various forms by various publishers without any substantial changes.[31]

The last fifty years have witnessed great advances in the publication of Pico's short speech, most notably represented in the Italian editions of Tognon (1987) and Bausi (Pico 2003). Unfortunately, however, none of this progress has been reflected in any English translation until now. The present edition not only brings much of the scholarship of the last half-century into the Anglophone debate over this important work but also

contributes substantially in its own right to the study and interpretation of the text.

1 E.g., Garin (1961, 231–33), Bori (2000, 30–33, 73–84), and Bausi (1996, 108–16).

2 Pico's decision not to make its entire contents public was no doubt influenced by the events described by Pier Cesare Bori in his introduction to the present volume.

3 The 1496 edition is described in detail by Quaquarelli and Zanardi (2005, 101–10), who have provided the most complete index of Pico's works. However, one may also wish to consult the standard repertories as well as Pico (1942, 89–99), Valenziani (1950), and Ludovici (1963).

4 Cited from Garin (Pico 1994b, xxii–xxiii).

5 The *Oration* begins on folio QQ2r and is there entitled simply "Oratio Ioannis Pici Miran. Concordiae Comitis." On the index page, the work bears the title "Oratio quædam elegantissima" ("A Certain Most Elegant Oration"), which establishes de facto the convention followed in the work's appellation until 1504.

6 See Farmer (1998, 18–19).

7 Aquilon (1971, 113).

8 Quaquarelli and Zanardi (2005, 110–18). The *Oration* begins on folio T4v, 28.

9 The *Oration* begins on folio S6r. Evidence gleaned from the characters used in the printing of quinternions P and Q suggest that their production

was entrusted to Cristoforo de’ Pensi. See Quaquarelli and Zanardi (2005, 119–25).

10 Quaquarelli and Zanardi (2005, 175–76).

11 Quaquarelli and Zanardi (2005, 176–78). The *Oration* begins on folio S4r.

12 Quaquarelli and Zanardi (2005, 178–80). The *Oration* begins on folio e4r.

13 Quaquarelli and Zanardi (2005, 180–82). The *Oration* begins on folio N3r.

14 Quaquarelli and Zanardi (2005, 192–93). It should not escape our notice that Basel and Strasbourg traditionally considered themselves rival centres of humanistic publishing. Thanks largely to Petri, the former held sway in the production of Pico’s texts.

15 Quaquarelli and Zanardi (2005, 182–84). The *Oration* begins on folio Dd1*r*. This Basel edition of 1557 was reprinted in Pico (1969b).

16 See Garin’s introduction to his edition of Pico’s works (in Pico 1942, 54–55).

17 See Burckhardt (1966) and Bietenholz (1959).

18 See Bietenholz (1971), and see also Francesco Borghesi’s introduction in the present volume.

19 Quaquarelli and Zanardi (2005, 184–88). The *Oration* begins on folio l1v.

20 Quaquarelli and Zanardi (2005, 188–91). The *Oration* begins on folio Dd1r. This Basel edition of 1572–73 was reprinted in Pico (1971, *Opera omnia*). Basel, a fiery centre of Reformation humanism, is responsible not only for the most important pre-modern editions of Pico but many other intimately related texts as well (e.g., Plato, Plotinus, and Ficino).

21 See Garin's notes in Pico (1971, 1:vii).

22 The history of the Petri family was traced by Cullman (1913) and the family business by Hieronymus (1997). The edition is described by Quaquarelli and Zanardi (2005, 301–4).

23 Pico (1905).

24 The *Oration* appears on pp. 219–41 and bears the title *Orazione sulla dignità dell'uomo*.

25 Pico, *Über die Würde des Menschen* (1940).

26 Pico, *The Very Elegant Speech* (1940).

27 Pico (1941). This edition was reprinted in 1942 and again in 1943.

28 Pico (1942).

29 Pico (1948). See also Pico (1953).

30 Pico (1956).

31 The most significant among the slight modifications made to any of these translations since their original publication were those of Paul J. W. Miller, who inserted corrections into Wallis's version for the 1965 edition (see Pico 1998). For the sake of completeness, mention must also be made

of the otherwise unremarkable translation of Fallico and Shapiro (Pico 1967).

Interpretations

Francesco Borghesi

Ever since it began circulating at the end of the 1480s, the meaning of the *Oration on the Dignity of Man* has been open to debate. One of the problems related to a proper interpretation of Giovanni Pico's thought has been the absence of critical editions of his works and the relatively small number of in-depth investigations of his sources. In more recent years, especially after the five hundredth anniversary of his birth in 1963, a number of new studies and commented editions of his texts have appeared, offering new grounding for a theoretical assessment of his opus.

The most influential interpretations in Pico studies are represented by scholars such as Giovanni Gentile,[1] Ernst Cassirer,[2] Eugenio Garin,[3] and Paul Oskar Kristeller,[4] who, in different ways, have seen in Pico a "modern" philosopher. Others, such as Frances Yates,[5] Paola Zambelli,[6] and Brian Copenhaver,[7] have emphasized his interest in magic and astrology, as well as his close ties to the esoteric and cabalistic strains of the Renaissance. In opposition to these tendencies, there is yet another that places him in the theological continuum that began in the Scriptures, continued in the Church Fathers, and culminated in Scholasticism. This position is represented by the studies of Giovanni Di Napoli, Henri De Lubac, Heinrich Reinhardt, Fernand Roulier, Antonino Raspanti, Walter Euler, Pier Cesare Bori, and Louis Valcke.[8] While these authors' arguments can vary a great deal,[9] they remain in agreement on the theological relevance of Pico's work.

At stake in these studies is more than the relevance of the *Oration* alone; rather, they take into consideration a comprehensive interpretation of

Giovanni Pico's thought and its relation to the meaning of Renaissance humanism. It is interesting to note, however, that in a very recent biography of Pico, Louis Valcke dates the history of the myth of Giovanni Pico back to the classic study of Jacob Burckhardt, *The Civilization of the Renaissance in Italy* (1860). Valcke writes that Burckhardt, in interpreting Renaissance humanism as a phenomenon presenting all the characteristics typically attributed to the modern period (such as a conceptual divide with the Middle Ages and an exaltation of man's freedom from a superior ontological order), makes reference to a passage of Pico's *Oration*. In Valcke's view, later interpretations, such as those of Ernst Cassirer and Eugenio Garin, have followed Burckhardt's footsteps in presenting Pico's *Oration* as the manifesto of the Renaissance. These interpretations made possible the building of a mythical image of a Promethean Pico as the symbol of his age and are likely to have provided the grounding for a "modernizing" idea of Renaissance humanism.[10]

The contentious passage originally quoted by Burckhardt concerns the interpretation of the section of the *Oration* that deals with the story of Creation. According to Pico, the dignity of man – *opus indiscretae imaginis* ("a creature of indeterminate image") and thus an image of God – lies in his calling to transcend all images by following a path that involves three stages: ethical transformation (action), intellectual research (reflection), and, finally, perfection through his identification with the ultimate reality. In Pico's interpretation, this paradigm must be considered universal insofar as it exists in every philosophical and theological tradition that was known to him: Christian, Jewish, Hellenistic, Islamic, Hermetic, and "Chaldean." This "path" derives from the conjunction of the Platonic and Stoic traditions in Philo of Alexandria but also depends on both Pseudo-Dionysius and Origen, the latter of which preserves the Solomonic roots of this arrangement in the prologue to his *Commentary on the Song of Songs*. Solomon is the author of Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and the Song of Songs, which respectively represent moral, natural, and contemplative modes of thought and, according to Origen, would have been the conduit through which this scheme was transmitted to Greece. Pico significantly omits the importance of Solomon and separates the second stage from the pessimism of Ecclesiastes, insisting in a very original fashion on the religious dignity of man's intellectual vocation. The *Oration* begins by declaring that the

dignity of man, of which both biblical and philosophical traditions speak, is not sufficiently proven by the argument that man has a special, dominant position over creation. To understand the true nature of human dignity, Pico writes, one must turn to the story of Creation. He relates this story in his own way, explaining that the human being, unlike all other creatures, must define his own nature, in which the seeds of all beings are present; the human creature may thus either degenerate or realize his true calling.[11]

One will recall that, after studying in the most important scholarly centres of northern Italy, Pico came to Florence in the 1480s with the intention of applying every known intellectual tool and philosophical tradition to biblical exegesis. From 1484 to 1485, he focused on Ficino's *pia philosophia* while continuing to study Western and Eastern philosophy, neglecting neither the *filosofi barbari* (whom he defended in a famous letter directed against Ermolao Barbaro)[12] nor Hebrew and Arabic sources. It was during this period that Pico's growing knowledge of a vast speculative corpus convinced him that *concordia* among philosophical and religious doctrines was not only possible but crucial.[13]

Over thirty years after Nicholas of Cusa's *De pace fidei* (1453) and nearly fifty years after the Council of Ferrara-Florence, the young philosopher attempted to promote his own version of Cusa's "peace of faith." Pico's *concordia* revealed his belief that the major doctrines of antiquity and the Middle Ages were essentially in harmony and that reconciliation was desirable wherever there were apparent differences of position. The outcome of this belief appears in his insistence on the possible attainment of a *concordia* in which religious and philosophical disagreements can be reconciled in order to achieve a "superior unity."[14] This perspective was not new in that it had already been addressed in, for example, the philosophical programme of Boethius. Pico was essentially reformulating a well-known theme in medieval philosophical and theological thought by proposing the agreement of every philosophical and theological system in the pursuit of the unity of truth. His ultimate goal was to reveal that the ancient philosophical concept of the "One" is the "One Itself" or, more simply, "Being Itself."

Werner Beierwaltes claimed that Pico's identification of the "One" with "Being" derived from his interest in demonstrating the *concordia* of Platonic and Aristotelian philosophy. According to Pico's metaphysical interpretation of Plato's *Parmenides*, the "One" of the first hypothesis is God; nevertheless, God as pure reality, according to Aristotelian theology, is "Being Itself" ("totius esse plenitudo, plenitudo ipsius esse"). What remains to be proven is that this "One" is and that pure "Being" not only is the "One" but also the "One Itself." It is certainly true that for Pico the sense of the proposition that God "is above Being" – a thesis maintained by Plato's Academy and by later Platonists – is not only transcended by this identity but, more importantly, is legitimized from a Platonic and Aristotelian point of view. The assertion "super ens, super unum, super verum" applied to pure "Being," identical to the "One Itself," meant unequivocally that the divine principle is not any particular, determined, concrete "Being" or "One" but rather "Being" and the "One Itself." These claims of unity had already been anticipated by Pseudo-Dionysius, who offered a definition of God as the "One above Being" in the sense of Exodus 3:14, "ego sum qui sum," and equally as pure "Being" – a further demonstration of Pico's thesis.[15] According to Pico's own words in the *Heptaplus*:

> Hoc distamus a caelo, quod illum naturae necessitate, nos pro nostra libertate movemur. Pulsat enim assidue animum tuum spiritus motor. Si obaudias, tibi relinqueris tuo torpori, tuae infirmitati, miser et infelix. Si admittas, statim Deo plenus per orbem religionis ad Patrem, ad Dominum reportaris, in eo vitam semper possessurus, in quo et semper, etiam antequam fieres, vita fuisti. Haec est vera felicitas, ut unus cum Deo spiritus simus, ut apud Deum non apud nos Deum possideamus, cognoscentes sicut e cogniti sumus. Ille enim nos, non per nos, sed per se ipsum cognovit. Ita et nos cognoscemus illum per ipsum et non per nos. Haec est tota merces, haec est vita aeterna, haec est sapientia quam sapientes saeculi non cognoverunt, ut ab omni multitudinis imperfectione redigamur in unitatem per copulam indissolubilem cum eo qui est ipsum unum.

> [We differ from the heavens in that they are moved by the necessity of their nature and we in proportion to our freedom. The moving spirit knocks unremittingly at the door of your soul. If you fail to hear, you will be left wretched and unhappy in your own torpor and weakness. If you let it in, you will be carried back at once full of God, along the orbit of religion to the Father, to the Lord, to possess life forever in him, in whom you always had life even before you were made. This is true felicity, to be one spirit with God, so that we possess God in God, not in ourselves, but in himself, knowing him just as we are known. For he knows us not in ourselves, but in himself. Likewise we shall know him in himself and not in ourselves. This is our whole reward, this is the eternal life, this is the wisdom which the wise men of this world do not know, that from every imperfection of multiplicity we are brought back to unity by an indissoluble bond with him who is himself the One.]
>
> (*Expositio septima de felicitate, quae est vita aeterna*, *Proemium libri septimi*, Pico 1998, 152; Pico 1942, 336)

This excerpt can be related to the passage in the *Oration* in which Pico writes:

> Qui enim se cuipiam ex philosophorum familiis addixerunt, Thomae videlicet aut Scoto (qui nunc plurimum in manibus) faventes, possunt illi quidem vel in paucarum questionum discussione suae doctrinae periculum facere. At ego ita me institui, ut, in nullius verba iuratus, me per omnes philosophiae magistros funderem, omnes scedas excuterem, omnes familias agnoscerem. Quare, cum mihi de illis omnibus esset dicendum, ne, si privati dogmatis defensor reliqua posthabuissem, illi viderer obstrictus, non potuerunt, etiam si pauca de singulis proponerentur, non esse plurima quae simul de omnibus afferebantur. Nec id in me quisquam damnet, quod me quocumque ferat tempestas, deferar hospes. Fuit enim cum ab antiquis omnibus hoc observatum, ut, omne scriptorum genus evolventes, nullas quas possent commentationes illectas preterirent […]. Et profecto angustae est mentis intra unam se Porticum aut Achademiam continuisse; nec

potest ex omnibus sibi recte propriam selegisse, qui omnes prius familiaritates non agnoverit. Adde quod in una quaque familia est aliquid insigne, quod non sit ei commune cum caeteris […]. Quid erat si Latinorum tantum, Alberti scilicet, Thomae, Scoti, Egidii, Francisci Henricique philosophia, obmissis Graecorum Arabumque philosophis, tractabatur, quando omnis sapientia a barbaris ad Graecos, a Graecis ad nos manavit? (§§179–93)

[This is because those who have devoted themselves to any one of the schools of philosophy, siding for instance with Thomas or with Scotus, who are now most in fashion, can surely put their doctrines to the test in the discussion of but a few questions. As for myself, however, I have resolved – in order not to swear by the words of another – to pore over all masters of philosophy, to examine every page and to become acquainted with all schools. Therefore, since I was to speak of all of these doctrines (lest I seem committed to advocating one in particular as a result of having neglected the others), it was impossible for there not to be very many questions concerning all of them together, even if only a few questions were proposed in regard to each. Nor should anyone condemn me on this account, for "wherever the tempest carries me, there I am brought as a guest." For it was a rule observed by all the ancients in studying every kind of writer never to pass over any commentaries they were able to read […]. And confining oneself within a single Porch or Academy certainly does show narrowness of mind. Nor can anyone rightly choose his own doctrine from them all, unless he has first made himself familiar with each of them. In addition, there is in each school something distinctive that is not shared in common with any other […]. Inasmuch as all wisdom has flowed from the barbarians to the Greeks and from the Greeks to us, what would have been the point of dealing only with the philosophy of the Latins, that is, of Albert, Thomas, Scotus, Giles, Francis and Henry, while leaving the Greek and Arab philosophers aside?]

Pico was pursuing religious unity, not merely the harmony of Platonic philosophy with Christianity. His aim was more ambitious than Marsilio

Ficino's in that he intended to demonstrate – on textual and philological grounds – the fundamental harmony of all philosophical and religious doctrines. In doing so, Pico did not mean to say that everything these doctrines taught was fully true but that each one contained elements of truth, some of which could be called universally true.[16] As Charles Schmitt notes, Pico "considered many roads to lead to the truth, parallel paths, as it were, which all lead to the same end, but which may reach it in different ways. He further considered all philosophical systems and all religions to contain a portion of truth, which would prove beneficial to those who studied them."[17]

Comparing Pico's and Ficino's ideals of "concord" might help further clarify the matter. Frederick Purnell, Jr., who did extensive work on the history of the *concordia Platonis ac Aristotelis* of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, analyzed Ficino's "concordism." Purnell regarded "concordism" as "one of the contexts in which many Renaissance philosophers, including Ficino and his closest followers, interpreted Plato's thought." With the term "philosophic concord," Purnell referred

> to the tendency to view Plato's teaching as fundamentally in harmony with those of other major thinkers and to strive to effect a reconciliation wherever there are apparent differences of position. The culmination of this tendency may be found in the claim made by Giovanni Pico della Mirandola and others that a true *concordia philosophica* is possible, in which many, if not all, philosophical disagreements can be shown to be merely verbal or else reconciled by placing the discordant position in proper perspective.[18]

According to Purnell, two major traditions influenced "concordism" and exerted a significant influence on Ficino: the *prisca theologia* (also known as *pia philosophia*) and the *comparatio* of Plato and Aristotle. The former entails the belief in a tradition of ancient wisdom traceable to the sages of a remote past and was elaborated in the writings of George Gemistus Pletho, the Byzantine scholar of Neoplatonic philosophy. Purnell writes: "The

acceptance of this tradition of ancient wisdom carried with it an inherent predisposition toward concordism. Since Plato was heir to the accumulated wisdom of his predecessors within the tradition, Ficino was naturally led to stress the points of agreement."[19] The second tradition that influenced Ficino, the *comparatio* of Plato and Aristotle, refers to the history of the interpretation of the philosophies of Plato and Aristotle and addresses the extent to which the two thinkers are ultimately reconcilable. Some have suggested that such reconciliation can be extensive, illustrating the fundamental unity of outlook between Plato and Aristotle on many central philosophical issues. Others have regarded such a harmonization as something impossible to achieve without damaging the philosophers' core beliefs.[20]

While both of these trends have found advocates throughout the history of Western philosophy, Purnell analyzes the contribution of Ficino to the former, stressing the crucial influence of Henry Bate of Malines's *Speculum divinorum et quorundam naturalium* (composed between 1281 and 1305) and Gemistus Pletho's *De differentiis Platonis et Aristotelis* (1439) on Florentine Platonism. In this perspective, Pico, with Francesco da Diacceto, is seen as representing one of the first attempts to effect an overall harmonization of the views of Plato and Aristotle, thanks to the stimulus his project received from Ficino's acceptance of a place for Aristotelian natural philosophy within an overall Platonic program. The tradition of *prisca theologia* and the *comparatio* are singled out as the two main influences on Ficino's "concordism." Ficino, in return, is viewed as having a profound influence on the diffusion of both traditions.[21]

Although influenced by Ficino's treatment of the subject, Pico's argument aims to exceed the boundaries of his discourse on "concord." In the interpretation by Pier Cesare Bori, Pico's human dignity consists in the mystical vocation of the human creature, as a creature of indeterminate image, to transcend any image, becoming one with the divinity that is beyond representation, and human vocation is a mystical vocation that has to be realized following a three-stage way, which necessarily comprehends moral transformation, intellectual research, and final perfection in the identity with the absolute reality. According to Bori, who accentuates the

mystical aspect, this paradigm is universal because it can be retraced in every tradition.[22] Thus, Pico's thought is pervaded by a pluralistic perspective: many are the ways that lead to the same goal, although Pico professes one of these, the Christian way.

If Pico is to be considered a "concordist," it is reasonable to assume that his conception of Christianity was "inclusive" and should therefore be opposed to another conception that could be called "exclusive." The "exclusive" conception of Christianity says that what is "different" cannot be included in the Christian tradition and therefore cannot be saved; hence the necessity of, for instance, conversion. An "inclusive" conception of Christianity would tend to include what is "different" in that even those who do not belong to the Christian religion would not necessarily be considered in error and therefore on the wrong "way." Thus, the Christian way would have to be considered one of a number of possible ways leading to the ultimate truth. In this sense, all philosophical systems and religions – all "cultures," we might say – may contain a portion of truth and may lead to the same end, which can be reached through different ways.

Although Pico never provides a definition of *concordia*, many scholars refer to his "concordistic" tendencies.[23] Indeed, it may sound surprising that there is a lack of agreement on what *concordia* actually is. In some cases, the reference seems to be made to an "inclusive" idea of *concordia*; in others, scholars seem to make reference to a "reductionist" notion of *concordia*, such as that of "*concordia Platonis ac Aristotelis,*" on which Purnell expands.[24]

The notion of an "inclusivist" *concordia*, such as Bori's, belongs to the tradition of a pluralistic Christian theological doctrine that looks to include other (and apparently conflicting) theologies. This tradition helps better define Pico's "concordism" by way of the notion of "religious pluralism." In this perspective, Pico's idea of man's freedom is a power situated in what recently has been called a "theological teleology." The purpose of such freedom is to allow the human person to ascend to a higher place and, ultimately, to become one with God the creator. Pico's ontology implies a potential for diverse viewpoints without abandoning the Christian truth. The

human person is capable, by virtue of his freedom, of viewing the world from different perspectives. This possibility is an empirical fact that presents the challenge of finding unity in diversity. Let us not forget that what we are concerned with here is a search, a dynamic process, and that, for Pico, despite the multiplicity of perspectives, truth is ultimately one. According to this critical stance, the oneness of truth reflects the deeper unity of things, as all multiplicity has originated from the One.[25]

If this perspective is sustainable, we encounter the question of religious diversity. Simply put, if there is one God, why are there so many different religious traditions? From the point of view of "religious pluralism," the fundamental fact is not religious diversity. Rather, it is a single truth expressed through multiple human ideas and languages.[26] Consequently, placing Pico within the Christian tradition as a "religious pluralist" does not seem to raise any issues: he is not standing outside the Christian faith looking for a general truth to be found in all religions. This is why Pico can argue without embarrassment that the truth of non-Christian religious traditions confirms Christian truth in a Christological perspective.

From a hermeneutical point of view, the subject gives rise to a methodological problem. The notion of *concordia* may be considered from either a "historical" or a "structural" perspective. It is possible to consider Pico's attitude within the context of the relationship of the various religious confessions of his time, as has been done by commentators such as Eugenio Garin and Cesare Vasoli, who have preferred to assume a "historical" stance. It is equally possible, however, to consider the structural relationships between mysticism and religious experience within different traditions according to a "structural" or "meta-historical" perspective, as Fernand Roulier, Stéphane Toussaint, and Pier Cesare Bori have done.[27]

From a theological point of view, Jacques Dupuis has recently raised the question as to whether religious pluralism can be accepted or tolerated as a de facto reality in our world or whether it can be seen as existing de jure.[28]Perhaps the issue was not dissimilar in Italy toward the end of the fifteenth century: a period full of ecumenical hopes in which numerous developments that, only a few decades later, would appear unthinkable

might have felt possible. In the case of Giovanni Pico, the problem is whether his thought can be considered at once a real “pensée de la différence” *ante litteram* as well as a form of “universalism.”

In some cases, Pico’s expectation is to “reach the absolute”; in others, it is to “come to know all schools.” Whenever the reference is to transcendental truth and man’s foundation in divine nature, the former prevails; when it relates to various doctrines that contain portions of truth, the latter takes over. The Neoplatonists, for instance, and, above all, Plotinus, reason in a “meta-historical” way and look at the agreement between Plato and Aristotle as a “structural” fact. The agreement comes to an end when, in their opinion, Aristotle is in error: his doctrine of *Noûs* is correct, but he considers *Noûs*, “Intelligence” intended as intuition, the first principle and not a derivative one. Plotinus claims not to be proposing anything new because the foundation of truth is transcendent and divine. But, after this suggestion, he continues on with a doxographic examination of the doctrines of different philosophers (*Enneads* V.1.8–9).[29]

It is not that one aspect is true and the other false; they are simply two different levels of reading and should be kept separate. Pico, in whose work it is possible to find both attitudes, held that every major theological tradition contained elements of truth and that these elements could be combined into a grand synthesis that was at the same time compatible with orthodox Christianity. Like Nicholas of Cusa in his *Cribratio Alchorani* (1460–61), he believed that previous theologians’ understanding of the sources of their own theological traditions was not necessarily correct. In fact, his aim was to construct a new theology using material from existing historical theologies as building blocks. This “new” theology would be superior to those already in existence because it would give a richer understanding of Christian truths. This is not to imply that Pico was interested in directly challenging Christian dogmas. But he did wish (like many humanists) to move Christian theological speculation beyond the circle of traditional authorities.

This is the background of an interpretive approach that, to a certain extent, has informed the work of most members of the Bologna–Brown

Pico Project. It is, of course, not the only possible approach. Shortly after the appearance of the edition of the *Oration* by Saverio Marchignoli, another, by Francesco Bausi, was published. Bausi's is now considered the standard edition of the *Oration*, as it makes available the best Latin text,[30] a very reliable translation in Italian, and invaluable commentary. It also offers a very interesting basis for comparison with the Marchignoli edition. In a way, this comparison can be appreciated as the perfect case study for the relationship between philology and interpretation insofar as the two editions are both based on solid textual ground while the authors' interpretations could not be more different.

In the introduction to his edition, Bausi explains his interest in the *Oration* as a literary text. Thus his analysis, concerned with the stylistic, rhetorical, and linguistic aspects of the text, does not attempt to identify sources that can be only hypothetically considered as such. Instead, it aims to trace sources that have an impact on the textual fabric. He refuses the idea of proposing an interpretation of the *Oration* but makes clear that his study is geared toward establishing a textual basis on which to base a hermeneutical discussion.

Bausi further argues that the *Oration* should be classified as belonging to the literary genre of the humanistic *prolusiones*: he clarifies that this would not diminish its importance, but it would underline the occasional character that it had in Pico's mind. In fact, Pico wrote the *Oration* as an introductory piece to the *Conclusiones Nongentae*, the nine hundred theses to be debated in Rome during a "council" organized by Pico in the presence of Pope Innocent VIII. He did not intend to give it any special theoretical meaning.[31] However, Bausi seems to bring his opinion a step forward when he claims that, since it was so clearly linked to the project of the Roman dispute, the *Oration* is not – and was not considered by its author – a text with a theoretical independence of its own.[32]

This view is perhaps as extreme as the interpretation of those scholars who regard the *Oration* as carrying the seeds of Pico's "concordistic" ideal and believe that it can be taken seriously from a theoretical point of view, but it is nevertheless based on solid textual ground. An opposition to it can

only rely on the same tools, which is what has been attempted by Pier Cesare Bori and the members of the Pico Project, who, despite the evident differences in their ways of approaching the same text, acknowledge the importance of Bausi's work and have addressed the present edition in open dialogue with it.

The fact that Pico attempted to propagate his "concordistic" theology among authorities in Christendom through the *Conclusiones Nongentae* and the *Oration* becomes significant in that it suggests that Giovanni Pico had transformative aims as radical as those of the religious reformers of the succeeding generation. This notion should not sound too surprising, as the connection between humanist and Reformation thought has long been acknowledged by studies in both fields. Delio Cantimori noted that in Pico's writings one can retrieve several topics that will make an appearance in the radical reevaluation of the principles of theoretical speculation and civic life that informed the aspirations of Italian heretics in the sixteenth century.[33] Eugenio Garin and Cesare Vasoli have emphasized several times the irenic significance of the *Oration*, in which peace and *concordia* are not only meant in a moral and philosophical sense but also in an ecclesiastical and civic one.[34]

According to Charles Lohr, "[a]fter Pico, the history of metaphysics shifted from the problem of God to the problem of being. It is no accident that the Fifth Lateran Council determined not only the supremacy of the pope to the councils, but also the metaphysical demonstrability of man's immortality."[35]

In recent years, a number of important editions of previously unknown texts have appeared concerning Pico's Hebrew and Arabic sources. These newly available texts cast light both on the way Pico was operating as a scholar of biblical, theological, and philosophical literature and on his philological methodology. They show how Pico's reading of Hebrew and Arabic texts was scarcely based on his own linguistic skills but rather dependent on the knowledge of his tutors, such as the Jewish intellectuals Flavius Mithridates and R. Yohanan Alemanno. The importance of these texts derives from the fact that they demonstrate how Pico used them, as

well as from the influence that they had on both his own scholarship and the intellectual climate of European culture. The studies by Michela Andreatta on Mithridates' Hebrew–Latin translation of the *Commentary on the Song of Songs* by Gersonides;[36] by Giulio Busi, Saverio Campanini, and Giacomo Corazzol on Pico's cabalistic library;[37] by Fabrizio Lelli on Alemanno;[38] and by Angelo Michele Piemontese and Benoît Grévin on Mithridates' and Pico's Korans[39] bring to attention a great wealth of materials which will help to further contextualize Pico's thought in the realm of religious pluralism. These materials still require extensive analysis but might end up providing historical and philosophical studies with a new image of Renaissance humanism.

1 Gentile (1968; originally published in 1916).

2 Cassirer (1942).

3 See especially Garin (1937, 1950, 1963) but also Garin (1965, 1995). For the complex interpretation of Giovanni Pico provided by Garin, see Vasoli (2003).

4 Kristeller (1965).

5 Yates (2002, originally published in 1964). For some recent assessments of the "Yates thesis" concerned with the fundamental value attached by Renaissance thinkers to the Hermetic-magical tradition, see the introduction by J. B. Trapp to Yates (2002, xvii–xxvi), and Idel (2001, 2004).

6 Zambelli (1995). See also Zambelli (1991, 251–327) and, for the hypothesis suggesting that the scientific revolution was promoted by, among other things, the Hermetic idea of man who is "magnum miraculum," see Rossi (1974, first edition published in 1957).

7 Copenhaver (2002a), but also Copenhaver (2002b).

8 Di Napoli (1965), De Lubac (1974), Reinhardt (1989), Roulier (1989), Raspanti (1991), Euler (1998), Bori (2000), and Valcke (2005). Valcke has written a great deal on Pico, but this last volume seems to summarize his interpretation.

9 For instance, while Reinhardt emphasizes the pre-modern character of Pico's "systematic thought," De Lubac sees him as a lay theologian who began but never completed the task of reconciling every human civilization with God through Christ.

10 While overstated, Valcke's point provides an idea of the magnitude of the issue. See Valcke (2005, 13–25).

11 Bori (1998, 464). But see also Lohr (1988, 578–84) and Dougherty (2008, 124–32).

12 See Bausi (1998a).

13 "Concord" has to be preferred over the notion of "syncretism," which is not part of the philosophical and theological dictionary of Pico and lacks specificity. Used in a broad sense, the term causes semantic confusion, as in Farmer (1998, ix–x, 18–29).

14 Vasoli (1991, 114–17) and Vasoli (1985, 264), but also Purnell (1986).

15 Beierwaltes (1985, 217–19).

16 See Euler (1998, 226–28).

17 Schmitt (1965, 305).

18 Purnell (1986, 397–98).

19 Purnell (1986, 398, 400). On *prisca theologia*, see Schmitt (1970) and Walker (1972).

20 Purnell (1986, 402) and Mahoney (2004, 10–13).

21 Purnell (1986, 408–15). On Henry Bate and his *Speculum*, see Nardi (1945, 173–79), Gregory (1961), and Bate (1960, xiii–xxviii, but also xxxvi–xxxvii on Pico's manuscript containing Henry Bate's *Speculum*). On Pletho's *De differentiis*, see Kristeller (1972, 86–109), Monfasani (1976, 201–29), Hankins (1990, 193–208), and Monfasani (2002). This treatise, written in Greek, although mostly known by its Latin title, is the summary of a series of lectures given by Pletho in 1439 while a member of the Greek delegation to the Council of Florence.

22 Bori (1998, 464), but also Bori (2000, 85–94).

23 In the writings of Eugenio Garin, this notion has always been present, perhaps even central. At times, *concordia* is referred to as a Renaissance *topos*; see Hankins (1990, 64n79), who remarks that a forceful defence of philosophical "concord" was widespread among Renaissance humanists.

24 On the *comparatio* tradition, see Purnell (1971).

25 Sudduth (2008, 72–73).

26 Sudduth (2008, 74–75).

27 Roulier (1989), Toussaint (1995), and Bori (1998, 2000). On "historical" and "meta-historical" perspectives, see Borghesi (2003, 101–7).

28 See Dupuis (1997, 386–87). But see also Dupuis (2001, 15–35) regarding the debates raised by Dupuis (1997), and Ruggieri (2007) for a recent assessment of the challenges that Christian theology is facing in an age of diversity and radical pluralism of cultures, religions, and values.

29 I am grateful to Dino Buzzetti, with whom I had several conversations that were of great help in better understanding the theoretical aspects of these matters.

30 Bausi's is the Latin critical text that is used in this edition.

31 Pico (2003, xi).

32 Pico (2003, xv).

33 Cantimori (1939, 4): "negli scritti […] di Pico della Mirandola si poteva raccogliere più di un motivo atto a essere svolto nel senso di quella radicale rielaborazione dei principî della vita sociale e dei presupposti speculativi, filosofici come teologici, di essi, che era l'aspirazione degli eretici italiani, e che informa di sè tutte le loro dottrine." But see also Cantimori (1975, 145): "Dapprima è un'aspirazione. Per il Quattrocento italiano, e per gli uomini che vivono negli anni precedenti il sacco di Roma, la riforma religiosa è una grande speranza che si formula istituzionalmente nelle critiche del Valla, ma soprattutto filosoficamente nello sforzo del Ficino per creare una nuova dottrina apologetica del cristianesimo […]. Questa aspirazione trova la sua espressione piú viva e immediata nelle fervide speranze destate dal Concilio lateranense del 1512; ma la sua soddisfazione piena nello spiritualismo cristiano di Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, che assieme al pensiero del Ficino costituisce la sostanza delle idee e delle suggestioni diffuse in tutta Europa da […] Erasmo da Rotterdam." This previously unpublished paper by Cantimori was written in 1938. For Pico's influence on Huldrych Zwingli, see Schindler (1996).

34 See, for instance, Garin (1952b, 137–39) and Vasoli (1985). Vasoli's remarks are highlighted by Bori (2000, 80–81). See also Garin (1966, 474): "Il rinnovamento savonaroliano era un rinnovamento morale e politico, con preoccupazioni sociali, collocato in un'ampia prospettiva religiosa; quello auspicato da Pico era totale, investiva tutta la vita dell'uomo, tutta la società umana, anche se si esprimeva soprattutto in termini intellettuali, anzi filosofici. Savonarola, quando lo tenterà, limiterà il suo esperimento a

Firenze, pur presentandola come la nuova Gerusalemme; Pico sogna un messaggio universale, un apostolato irenico tra tutti gli uomini.”

35 Lohr (1988, 584). On religious reform, in a different but converging perspective, see Bori (2007), to be read with Bori (2008).

36 Andreatta (2008) and Gersonide (2009).

37 Respectively, Mithridates (2004), Mithridates (2005), and Recanati (2008). See also Corazzol (2012).

38 Lelli (1994, 1997) and Alemanno (1995). But see also Genazzano (2002).

39 Piemontese (1996, 2008) and Grévin (2008 and 2012). See also Piemontese (2012), in which the author identifies the Abdala Sarracenus mentioned at the beginning of Pico’s *Oration* as ‘Abd-Allāh b. al Tamir, head of the Christian community of Nagran (Yemen) and famous in medieval Islamic literature because of his martyrdom in 523 AD. I wish to thank Mauro Perani and Giacomo Corazzol for providing me with the abovementioned 2012 papers presented at the second international conference on Flavius Mithridates in 2008 before the publication of the proceedings.

Overview of the Text

§§1–23 (Francesco Borghesi and Massimo Riva)

The opening section of the *Oration* contains what could be called the original myth of humanism: the praise of man as a unique being, at the boundaries of the natural (earthly) and the supernatural (heavenly) realms. Pico begins his address by quoting an unidentified Arabic source in which he has read how a certain Abdallah (‘Abd-Allāh = servant of God) praises man as the most wondrous creature on all the “world’s stage” (§1).[1] He finds the same praise in a famous Hermetic text (*Asclepius*) that had recently been translated into Latin by Marsilio Ficino.[2] Yet Pico is dissatisfied with these commonplaces regarding man’s supremacy in creation that he finds in biblical and other religious and philosophical traditions (he also mentions the Chaldean “oracles” or Persian “magi”) as well as in the recent humanistic literature praising the dignity of man (e.g., Fazio, Manetti): man as “king of the creatures beneath him,” “*poco minore che gli angeli*” (“a little less than angels,” as Dante says,[3] quoting, like Pico, Ps. 8:6); man as microcosm, *copula* or *hymeneum mundi* (a link and an intermediary among creatures), “the midpoint between fixed eternity and fleeting time […] (as the Persians say)” (§3).

To understand the truth of the human condition (“a condition to be envied not only by beasts but even by the stars and the intelligences dwelling beyond this world,” §6), says Pico, one must resort to the story of Creation. However, in his retelling of Genesis (which informs the entire structure of the first part of the *Oration*) Pico distances himself from traditional versions. His establishing “scene” is based not only on biblical sources but also on Plato’s *Symposium* and Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite’s *De mystica theologia* (which Pico read in Ficino’s translation). In short, his staging conflates three garden images into one: the Garden of Eden (Gen. 2), the garden of Zeus (from the *Symposium*), and the paradise of angels

(from Dionysius).[4] From the Bible comes the sequence of creative acts that puts Adam at the centre of an already completed Creation, although the creative process is inverted. Pico's account begins in the heavens and moves downward toward earthly things (a sort of ontological degradation reminiscent of Neoplatonic doctrines): God first created the supercelestial sphere, then the moving stars, the animals on earth, and, last of all, the human being, created in order to ponder "the meaning of such a magnificent achievement, to love its beauty and to marvel at its vastness" (§12).[5] The scene of God's speech to man is also based on the Bible, although its content is remarkably different: there is no prohibition against approaching the Tree of Life but an invitation to direct knowledge, desire, and one's whole being toward the highest goal, "to be reborn into the higher orders, those that are divine" (§23). This transcendental goal – not simply obedience to God's commandments – is man's true vocation. (One may well detect here a positive reference to Gen. 3:21: "Behold Adam is become as one of us, knowing good and evil.") The theme of the image of man is again based on the Bible, yet according to Pico man is not created in God's likeness but is *opus indiscretae imaginis*, the work of indeterminate *image* (a term not necessarily to be interpreted as the equivalent of *nature*), "so that [he] may, as the free and extraordinary shaper of [him]self, fashion [him]self in whatever form [he] prefer[s]" (§22). This is a leitmotif that will be developed in the section immediately following (§§13–23).

Pico takes this stance not only in order to exalt man's free will, flexibility, and perfectibility but also, and especially, in order to argue that the ultimate goal of man is the attainment of a reality that transcends *every* image, so that humans become in effect the image of a nonimage. As a result, the biblical idea of man's dominion over all creatures – the very idea that was so important, by contrast, in Giannozzo Manetti's *De dignitate et excellentia hominis* and for Marsilio Ficino (in whose work Giovanni Gentile saw the first conception of *regnum hominis*: "the kingdom of man"[6]) – has here but a secondary role. The main justification for human dignity and excellence is not horizontal primacy but vertical tension.[7] We could say then that the dignity of man consists of the mystical vocation of the human being, as a creature of indeterminate image, to transcend all states (vegetal, animal, rational, intellectual) and to become one with the

divinity that is beyond representation (Plotinus, *Enneads* 6.9, 8.20). We can detect here a polemical note aimed at Ficino's *Theologia Platonica* (1482), with its insistence on the idea of human dignity as identified with the immortality of the soul, in its intermediate position between the body and "quality" on the one hand and angels and God on the other.[8] Pico's emphasis is different: man's freedom must fulfil itself through transcendental tension, with a dynamism not present in the static condition of the biblical Paradise, a dynamism that Pico finds instead in another garden.

While the presence of the myth of Epimetheus (from Plato's *Protagoras* 321) has been noted, it is remarkable that such a fundamental influence as the *Symposium* (interpreted by Ficino in his *De amore* and by Pico in his *Commento* in the same fateful year of 1486) has not yet been analyzed in depth. And yet, in the *Oration*, as in the *Symposium*, we find Eros and Adam celebrated not for their present excellence but for a sort of intermediate and imperfect condition, "neither of heaven nor of earth, neither mortal nor immortal" (literally stated in both the *Symposium* and the *Oration* §22). Precisely as a "medium" (*Oration*), or as a "metaxù" (*Symposium*), the human creature may, if so inclined, reach the supreme reality through the love of knowledge and wisdom. The *Symposium* account is well known: Eros was conceived in the garden of Zeus by Póros (resource) and Penía (poverty) the day Aphrodite was born. Eros receives his imperfect nature from this intermediate position between ignorance and knowledge, and from his constant search for the latter (*Symposium* 203d–204c). Both in the *Oration* and in the *Symposium*, therefore, we find: (a) a character – man and Eros, respectively – praised for his potential capacity to reach the highest ends; (b) someone who is in an intermediate condition, neither mortal nor immortal, neither of the earth nor of the heavens (*Symposium* 203e); (c) someone placed *in mundi meditullio* ("in the middle of the world"), capable of reaching, through the love of knowledge, the supreme reality (*Symposium* 202d); (d) the primacy of love, desire, and the will as the final essence of the human being, while the intellectual element is *not opposed to but a part of* spiritual development, supported by the dynamics of desire (and here we note a parallelism between the ascent described at the end of Diotima's speech in the *Symposium* and the exit

from the cave described in Plato's *Republic* 7).[9] This direct Platonic source alone is nevertheless insufficient to explain the particular attributes and articulation of this vertical tension. Pico relies on an additional model, that of the three-stage mystical ascension (purgation, illumination, perfection) set forth by Proclus and, most importantly, by the Neoplatonic Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite. Because Pico, along with his contemporaries, still believed Dionysius had been converted by Paul at the Areopagus (the source of the enormous reverence for Dionysius throughout the Middle Ages), he faithfully accepted Dionysius's explanation of the mystical ascent in terms of the vertical movement that Paul describes instead of as forward spiritual tension (Phil. 3:13: the so-called *epektasis*) or "running" (1 Cor. 9:24ff.). In the majestic opening of the *Oration*, we may detect as well the presence of Plotinus, taken both directly and through Marsilio Ficino. In his *Commentary on Plato's Symposium* (6.7),[10] Ficino provided a detailed exegesis of Eros's birth, which occurred on the same day that Venus was born. In Pico's *Commentary on a Love Song by Girolamo Benivieni*, we find an entire section (2.13) in which he speaks "Del nascimento di Amore e quello che si intende per li orti di Giove, per Poro e per Penia e per i natali di Venere" ("Of the birth of Love and what is meant by the gardens of Jove, by Póros, by Penía and by Venus's birthday," translation ours).[11] In short, we may conclude that in the opening scene of the *Oration*, the son of Póros and Penía, Eros, coalesces entirely with the creature made of earth and spirit, Adam, a being without archetype, an image of his own. His itinerary will consequently take Eros-Adam through every image, beyond all images, finding fulfilment only in the final identity with Him Who, being the source of all images, dwells in obscurity.[12]

How is it possible to reach such a fulfilment? One suggestion comes from Pico's portrayal of the angelic court; that is, the third garden (based on Pseudo-Dionysius's *De mystica theologia*). Man's task lies precisely in the emulation of the angels and in what they represent: the thrones, more distant from God, represent peaceful action and judicious discipline; the cherubim symbolize contemplation through dialectics and philosophy; and the seraphim, the nearest to the Godhead, represent unity with God through love. In this perspective, philosophy achieves its supreme meaning, and the *Oration* becomes a justification of philosophy as the intermediate stage –

the “cherubic stage” – of the mystical process. In sum, a careful reading of the opening section of the *Oration* suggests that man’s vocation, according to Pico, is a mystical one that must be realized through a threefold path that necessarily comprises moral transformation, intellectual inquiry, and a final perfection in the union with absolute reality. This paradigm is universal; it can be found in every tradition. Such a conclusion can be confirmed and illustrated by carefully examining Pico’s treatment of his disparate sources and by pointing out the significant twists to which they are sometimes subjected in order to make them compatible with his particular intentions. It is essential, therefore, to place in the foreground the very foundations that support Pico’s thought in the *Oration* rather than concentrating on the innumerable authorities from each tradition to whom he makes reference or on the myriad other quotations, allusions, and mythological images with which he adorns his speech.

§§24–50 (Massimo Riva)

Pico begins this portion of the *Oration* with emphatic praise for God’s “liberality” in the creation of man. Man’s happiness depends on God’s generosity, and the emblematic sign of God’s supreme benevolence toward His creature is the creative freedom that He bestowed upon the human being: the freedom to obtain what one wishes and to become what one wants. As Pier Cesare Bori underlines in his commentary on the previous sections, this dual emphasis on desire and free will is crucial for Pico, who clearly moves beyond the Ciceronian tradition of *gubernare terrena* (“the governing of earthly affairs”), a concept that was central to the civic thought of the first half of the fifteenth century, toward a theological-metaphysical horizon. However, this horizon is deeply rooted in the anthropological tradition of Florentine humanism (from Petrarch to Manetti).[13] Human beings must make the most of God’s gifts by freely developing the divine seeds planted in them. This is an idea of great suggestive power if translated (albeit anachronistically) into our contemporary context, in which ideas about “intelligent design” and the human capacity (and responsibility) to manipulate “the seeds” of nature are hotly debated.

Metamorphosis is the master metaphor of this whole section of the *Oration*: the freedom to change ourselves and to shape our own ontological destiny is an intrinsic and essential quality (dignity and potentiality) of human beings, so much so that we are distinguished and defined, among all creatures (including angels), by our lack of a precise and limiting image or identity. As a direct consequence of our freedom, however, we may resign ourselves to existing in a vegetative state (like plants), degrade ourselves to the behaviour of animals, or elevate ourselves to the point of transcending our human condition and reaching for the heavens, provided that we exercise in full our active intellect, which for Pico is superior to individual reason. Reaching for the heavens means becoming like angels and true "sons of God" (§29). Yet, as Pico seems to suggest, an even higher and exquisitely human goal can be achieved: mystical inspiration is easily detectable in this hymn-like and visionary crescendo designed to set the (lofty, if not hyperbolic) tone of the debate with the pope's theologians over his *Conclusiones*, his ambitious attempt at reconciling all ancient theological and philosophical traditions in a common path toward wisdom, or better, toward an active knowledge of the divine within us.

Here, in this segment of the *Oration*, Pico is trying to communicate to his intended audience his own deeply felt enthusiasm, his own vision and comprehension of the divine as a transformative, metamorphic power, directed both outward and inward.[14] To this end, he adopts a highly metaphorical language, borrowing from a variety of sources, in order to convey their common, fundamental message, which coincides with the inner spirit of his enterprise. In short, Pico delves into the various fragments of a *prisca theologia*, including his biblical exegesis (*Heptaplus* and *Expositiones in Psalmos*), guided by the intent to reconnect the mysteries and hidden truths scattered throughout them, always aiming at a *spiritual* interpretation of sacred or pagan texts through their literal, allegorical, moral, and anagogical meanings.[15] In the *Apology* (1487), Pico compares these four levels, in the Christian way of reading and explaining the Scriptures, with the Hebrew [sic] *Pesat* (literal meaning), *Midrash* (allegorical meaning), *Sechel* (tropological meaning), and *Cabala* (anagogical meaning), thus confirming that this procedure informed his approach to different textual traditions.[16] An ambivalent, exegetic, and

esoteric aim therefore informs his reading strategy and his references to his various (reliable or unreliable) sources, all culminating in the anagogical (or cabalistic) meaning, the spiritual goal of man, or how man can become one with God.[17]

As noted, a fundamental source for the *Oration* as a whole is Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite's *De mystica theologia* (read through Marsilio Ficino). In the first section of this work (1.1), the author describes the condition of one who faces God *sine interprete* ("without intermediary") (Garin 1972, 239). We can say that Pico puts himself in the same position; adopting Dionysius's imagery, based in turn on several passages from Scripture, he speaks of "darkness" as a divine attribute (like the night of Orphic mysteries and the Ein Soph of the Cabala)[18] and "blindness" as the necessary, paradoxical medium of human knowledge of the divine, a "seeing that consists in not seeing." This paradoxical imagery returns also in Pico's Neoplatonic sonnets, written in the same years, along with his commentary on Girolamo Benivieni's *Love Song*, a text in which Pico strives to embrace the true and full meaning of Eros.[19]

The changing nature of man (Eros and Adam) as an emanation of God's creative gift is illustrated in the simile of the chameleon, perhaps the most famous and enduring image used by Pico in the *Oration*. Aristotle used the simile of the chameleon in his *Nicomachean Ethics*, where he spoke of happiness as the product of perfect virtue and an accomplished life, measured against the instability of man's "fortunes." While Aristotle uses the term in a negative sense, pointing to the instability of the human condition, Pico positively emphasizes the transformative nature of the human being.[20] Closely related to, in fact coupled with, the image of the chameleon is the reference to Proteus. Taken together, these terms illustrate the central idea of this segment of the *Oration*, the Protean capacity of human beings to fashion themselves as they please. This idea must be understood in the light of Pico's appropriation (through Ficino) of another textual tradition, the Hermetic. "The form of humankind is multiform and various…," we read in *Asclepius*.[21] To add another layer to this already complex web of references, in Pico's *Conclusions on the Ways of Interpreting Orpheus' Hymns According to Magic*, we find the following

aphorism (n28): “He who cannot attract Pan approaches Proteus in vain.”[22] Edgar Wind explains this obscure passage as follows: “Mutability, according to Pico, is the secret door through which the universal invades the particular. Hence Proteus transforms himself continuously because Pan [All] is within him.”[23] This enigma seems to describe the unique situation of the human being in relation to the divine. As a chameleon and a Proteus, capable of changing shape (the Latin word is *effingere*) as well as imitating all images and forms, assuming all “names,” the human being is thus effectively an *agent* of the imageless God: his “demiurgic” (or magical) abilities reflect a degree of free will and free choice, which is, as we have seen, God’s supreme gift to man.[24] Commenting on this passage, Wind thus qualifies Pico’s radical mysticism: “This doctrine provides a convincing mystical justification for an eminently rational mental state.”[25] Again, we are faced with the fundamental ambivalence of Pico’s philosophical mysticism, which quite possibly provides a reason for our modern fascination with his thought.

What follows is one of the most enigmatic passages of the *Oration*, full of intricate references to biblical (albeit apocryphal) and cabalistic sources that address the angelic metamorphosis of Enoch-Metatron. Second- and third-century Church Fathers such as Justin Martyr, Irenaeus, Origen, and Clement of Alexandria all make reference to the Book of Enoch. Though it is difficult to say precisely to which text or texts Pico refers here, his library, acquired after his death by Cardinal Grimani and later dispersed, was rich in cabalistic works in Hebrew, many *sine titulo* and some simply forgeries (see both Kibre’s and Tamani’s reconstructions). Yet at least one important reference can be identified: in the commentary of Abraham Abulafia (Pico’s major cabalistic source) to Maimonides’ *Morèh Nevuchim* (*Dalālat al-hā‘irīnn, The Guide of the Perplexed*), entitled *Sitrè Toràh* (*The Secrets of the Law*) and included in both Kibre’s and Tamani’s lists, we read, “And they say that Enoch is Metatron and so says Ionethes Chaldeus […]” (translation mine).[26]

In the Third Book of Enoch, or Book of Enoch of the mystics of the *Merkabah* (chariot or throne of God), the elevation of Enoch has two versions. In the second of these versions, Enoch is “taken with the

Shekhinah” and “transfigured” as Metatron (“Methathronius”; i.e., he who is next to the throne of God, according to the prevailing, yet probably inaccurate, Greek etymology). After a devout life on earth, Enoch was elevated to the rank of the first angels and *Sar ha-panìm* (literally “prince of the divine visage,” or divine presence or countenance). Shekhinah, originally the female manifestation of God in man, is often identified with the Holy Ghost and the *Epinoia*, the feminine manifestation of God’s mind, of which the Gnostic Valentinus spoke.[27] This intricate constellation of possible cabalistic (and Gnostic) references, not precisely identifiable with a direct quotation of the Ethiopic (Third) Book of Enoch, hints at the complexity of Pico’s angelology, as articulated in the *Oration* and the *Conclusiones*.[28] Here too, as Wirszubski first suggested, we find the (missing) term *Metatron* in the *Conclusions according to Themistius* (1.19.2): “I believe that the active intellect that in Themistius is only illuminating is the same as Metatron in the cabala” (translation mine). It also appears in the *Cabalistic Conclusions Confirming the Christian Religion* 2.11.10: “That which among the cabalists is called [מטטרון] *Metatron* is without doubt that which is called Pallas by Orpheus, the paternal mind by Zoroaster, the son of God by Mercury, wisdom by Pythagoras, the intelligible sphere by Parmenides” (Farmer, trans., 1998, 525). All these symbols, according to Farmer, would syncretically refer “to the intellectual nature of the angelic mind” (Farmer 1998, 70).

Yet, in its formulation in the *Oration*, this supreme synthesis has the quality of a vision rather than a detached philosophical conclusion, informed as it is by a profound aspiration to a transcendental unity of all symbolic knowledge (the only knowledge of the divine allowed to man).[29] Again, mystical and intellectual, spiritual and rational (or magical) meanings are inseparable in Pico’s words, which is precisely what creates the suggestive nature of this text and gives the reader and the interpreter a choice: either follow Pico in his mystical flight (reshaping man into angel or pure spirit) or patiently try to extract the inner kernel of philosophical (intellectual) wisdom from the ancients’ most mysterious messages through the painstaking recomposition of its scattered sources.[30]

Next, we return to what we may call Pico's pre-modern (pre-evolutionistic) idea of a dynamic unity of all living things, earthly and celestial. It is the vision articulated by Pythagoras at the end of Ovid's *Metamorphoses* (15.160 ff.): "omnia mutantur, nihil interit…" ("all things are changing; nothing dies…").[31] Pico's thought seems inspired by the Pythagorean idea of transmigration: man as a microcosm, containing in himself the seeds and stages of all creation. This idea can also be found, with differing nuances, in many of the traditions he quotes, but it acquires new shades of meaning in his writings. The operations of the soul, its ascent or descent through the various stages and realms of the cosmos, can be envisioned from multiple points of view, including the practical theology of the Cabala (or the doctrine of the sefirot). The ambivalent tension inherent in the unity of body and soul, leading "upward" or "downward," is directly linked to the concept of man as a microcosm, a mirror of the whole of creation, and therefore capable of imagining, transforming, and reshaping (*effingere*) himself in the image of all other creatures (beasts or angels). Particularly effective is Pico's iterative and emphatic use of three almost synonymous terms in order to articulate man's specific and unique capability. The most interesting of these terms is *effingere*, from *ex fingere*, which has two fundamental meanings: (a) to form, to procreate with artifice (found in Tacitus, Pliny, Tertullian, and others); and (b) to imitate or imagine (again found in Tertullian). This dual semantic value, linked as it is to both a practical (magic?) and an imaginative (theoretical) meaning, sums up Pico's multilayered idea of man's creativity.

Again, this definition of a human being can be found at the core of all religious-philosophical traditions (*prisca theologia*), all confirming, in the eyes of Pico, the biblical narrative of Genesis, including the suras of Muhammad (the Qur'an) and the so-called Chaldean *Oracles*. In the latter, Pico supposedly found the adage that "Man is by nature diverse, multiform and inconstant" (ברנש הָ חוו מטבע משתנ ונדד ומחלפת גרמה כ לו), a sentence absent from the *editio princeps* but present in the Palatino manuscript, and, according to Wirszubski, possibly written in a mixture of Hebrew and Aramaic, in Ethiopic script (Wirszubski 1989, 241–44). According to Farmer, it was taken by Pico from a version of the *Oracles* provided to him by Flavius Mithridates and was most likely a forgery

(Farmer 1998, 146, 344–45). Whatever the source, the important question for modern readers remains: are these words to be understood for their moral and spiritual meaning (like Pico's implicit reference to the Pythagorean doctrine of metempsychosis), or are they the foundation of a different view of humanity, justified by effectively positioning the human being at the top of creation (summing up in himself all its various realms and creatures)?

The imaginative and transformative power of the human being may be a source of spiritual transcendence (emulating the "dignity" of angels, "unwilling […] to yield to them and unable to endure second place"); it can also be a source of narcissistic contemplation, or, even worse, "will to power" *ante litteram*. Many modern interpreters have indeed emphasized the latter subtexts. This ambiguity is implicit in a passing reference to the nature of *demons* that we find in the Palatino manuscript but is erased from the *princeps*: "If [man] cultivates his rational seeds, he will become a *demon* or a heavenly animal. If he cultivates his intellectual seeds, he will be an angel and a son of God."[32] Interestingly enough, in his *Platonic Theology* 14.3, Ficino connects "the life of demons" to the contemplation of mathematics, the rational order of celestial bodies (with their astrological symbols). This seems to be Pico's meaning as well, as though among the possibilities open to man there exists an imperfect metamorphosis into a celestial "demon," provided he raises himself to the contemplation of the cosmos as the theatre of his metamorphosis, without reaching for a superior, intellectual, and spiritual dimension.

In conclusion, man's lack of an image (or fixed identity) is both a prerogative and a liability: human dignity and freedom can be celebrated in one way (as gifts from God used to glorify God's creation) or the other (as the essence of our autonomous, self-fashioning being); that is, according to either religious or secularized principles. Yet in either case our freedom is insufficient and can even lead us astray if unaccompanied by the awareness of our responsibility, the unique privilege, and the burden of our peculiar mission to cultivate (in ourselves) all the seeds of creation: "Thus may we avoid abusing the most indulgent liberality of the Father by transforming

the free choice He bestowed upon us from something beneficial to something harmful” (§46).

§§51–102 (Michael Papio)

In the first part of this section (§§51–62), Pico moves toward an apparently more concrete plan of action as he continues his exhortation to men to fulfil their highest potential, the perfection of the self through the inspiration of the three highest classes of angels: the cherubim, seraphim, and thrones. In Pico’s representation of these angels, the thrones are judgment, the cherubim intelligence, and the seraphim love (§54). This arrangement is Pseudo-Dionysian, as Pico himself tells us, but corresponds even more precisely to one of the standard interpretations of the Christian mystics. Some three hundred years before Pico, Bernard of Clairvaux (1976) had already laid out this same scheme with perfect clarity in his advice to Pope Eugenius III:

> Putemus Thronos alto etiam ab his evolasse recessu, qui ex eo quod sedent, Throni dicuntur; et ex eo sedent, quod sedit in eis Deus. Neque enim sedere in eis qui non sederent posset. Quaeris quid [al. quam] illam sentiam sessionem? Summam tranquillitatem, placidissimam serenitatem, pacem quae exsuperat omnem intellectum. Talis est qui sedet in Thronis Dominus sabaoth, judicans omnia cum tranquillitate, placidissimus, serenissimus, pacatissimus. Et tales sibi constituit Thronos, simillimos sibi. Putemus Cherubin ex ipso sapientiae fonte, ore Altissimi haurientes, et refundentes fluenta scientiae universis civibus suis. Et vide ne is sit, quem propheta loquebatur, “fluminis impetus laetificans civitatem Dei.” Putemus Seraphin, spiritus totos divino igne succensos, succendere universa, ut singuli cives singulae sint lucernae ardentes et lucentes; ardentes charitate, lucentes cognitione. (*De consideratione* 5.4, *PL* 182.792c–793b)

> [Let us suppose that the Thrones have ascended to recesses even higher than these, and that they are called Thrones because they are seated and they are seated because God is seated upon them. For he

> could not be seated upon those who are not seated. Do you ask what I judge this sitting to be? Supreme tranquility, most placid serenity, peace which surpasses all understanding. Such is he, the Lord of Sabbaoth, who sits upon the Throne, judging all things with tranquility; he is the most placid, most serene, most peaceful. And he has established those as Thrones for himself which are most similar to him. Let us suppose the Cherubim drink from the very font of wisdom, the mouth of the Most High, and pour forth a stream of knowledge to all the citizens of heaven. And see if it is not this which the Prophet speaks of: "The stream of the river makes the city of God joyful." Let us suppose the Seraphim, spirits totally enkindled with divine fire, enkindle all so that each citizen is a lamp burning and shining: burning with love, shining with knowledge.]

The parallelisms between Pico and Bernard are striking, but despite the close similarities it would be difficult to claim with confidence that Bernard is our author's direct source. This sort of angelogical exegesis was present as well in other writers, such as Augustine (*De trinitate* 10.9), Gregory (*Homilies on the Gospels* 34.7, 10–14), Peter Lombard (*Sententiae* 2.9.2), and Bonaventure (*Itinerarium mentis in Deum* 4.4). What is certain, however, is that Pico made use of existing allegorical tropes in order to illustrate his own personal syncretic vision of the contemplative soul's ethical and erudite journey to God. Neatly woven into this already allusive fabric of Christian mysticism are strands of Neoplatonism, cabalistic symbolism, and ancient philosophy. Just as in Pico's references to the enigmatic Metatron, what may appear at first glance to be a haphazard combination of images is in effect a well-planned kaleidoscopic vision that joins the common with the exotic, the general with the specific. Just as elsewhere in the *Oration*, Pico here distils complex notions into their most essential emblems and combines them in such a way as to produce an intriguing composite that is just as suggestive as it is difficult to pin down. Such a technique would no doubt have been an extremely successful way to pique the interest of his intended audience. Among the most meaningful concepts he means to highlight in this segment of the *Oration* are the fundamental collaborative interaction of intellect, love (*caritas*), and wisdom; the inherent dignity in the individual's path to enlightenment; the omnipresent danger to one's spiritual well-being present both in the innate

weakness of the soul and in the chaotic nature of the universe; the immeasurable importance of peace (*pax philosophica*); and the requisite epistemological steps for attaining theological solace.

If we are to attain this ultimate goal, Pico explains, we must first learn God's ways or laws, a task we may accomplish by consulting those who have already experienced the direct vision of God. The examples he gives are Moses, who spent forty days in communion with God after the third month following the Exodus (Exod. 24:15–18), and Paul, who writes in his second letter to the Corinthians that he was raised up to heaven (2 Cor. 12:2–4). We who yearn to follow their example and become fortified by God's justice must prepare our souls through love and the illumination of the intellect. The figure of the cherub is particularly important in this extended metaphor. The cherubim traditionally guard the Tree of Life in Eden[33] (Gen. 3:24; cf. Ezek. 28:14, 16), stand alongside or support God's throne (Pss. 80:1, 99:1; Isa. 37:16), or serve as Yahweh's divine chariot (cf. the Ficinian reference to nectar in §98). They were also, as Pico naturally knew, a fundamental part of the tabernacle, the construction of which Moses oversaw (Heb. 9:5). In 2 Chron. 3:14, we read that they were depicted on the veil of the *adytum* (the Temple's innermost chamber), mentioned in §101. However, Pico principally plays on the traditional Augustinian interpretation of cherubim as representing *plenitudo scientiae* ("a fullness of knowledge"), which is ultimately derived from Philo's ἐπί γνωσις καὶ ἐπιστήμη πολλή ("recognition and full knowledge") and foreshadowed by Jerome's *multitudo scientiae* ("a wealth of knowledge").[34] As such, they are an ideal role model for the contemplative man (§59) insofar as the cherubim allow access to theological knowledge – and therefore to God – through love.[35]

In cabalistic thought, moreover, the cherubim represent the mysterious union of the earthly with the heavenly. The cherubic image was used by the Psalmist in the celebration of David's thankfulness after being delivered from his enemies. In Pico's re-elaboration of the motif, man's greatest enemy is the darkness of ignorance (§71). Augustine explains in his sermon on Psalm 17 that God, while flying above the cherubim, is incomprehensible to man; He is hidden in His dark waters and dark

tabernacle (Ps. 17:11–12).[36] In order to attain illumination, one must nurture his faith, even in the absence of awareness (cf. Rom. 13:10; 2 Cor. 5:7; and §63), until he has been given the gift of spiritual sight. If Pico's use of the highest order of angels is less than elaborate here, one would do well to consider the rather more concrete explanation in his moral exposition on Psalm 17 (Raspanti in Pico 1997, 166–68). There we read that the thrones' steadfastness bolsters our resolve and aids us not to be chased away *ex sede nostrae dignitatis* ("from the seat of our dignity"). The cherubim are the *plenitudo scientiarum* ("fullness of the sciences") (a pluralizing twist on Augustine that allows for more specificity, as we shall see), which helps us to avoid falling victim to the *veri ignorantia* ("ignorance of the truth"). Lastly, the seraphim, with the fire of love, completely purify our will and keep us from sinning through malice or improper choices.

At the close of this portion of the *Oration* (§§59–60), Pico makes specific references to God as moving/hovering/brooding above the waters of creation. Pico is here alluding to the "separation of the waters" (Gen. 1:7–9) into the upper and the lower (cf. Exod. 20:4 and Ps. 148:4). The upper level, as he explains in the *Heptaplus* (see especially 3.3), is the supercelestial realm, associated with the cherubim (*Hep*., proem 2), the seraphim, and the thrones (*Hep*. 3.3).[37] The lower waters were originally the seven planets, which were collected together and brought forth the seas and the ocean whence, as the Chaldeans held, came the nutritive elements that give rise to growth and regeneration in plant and animal life (*Hep*. 2.3, 3.4). Metaphorically, they also come to stand for the sensual and sensory characteristics of man (*Hep*. 4.3). The waters over which the "Spirit of the Lord" flies here are the upper. This "Spiritus Domini" is in the *Heptaplus* synonymous with the Spirit of Love (*Hep*. 3.2) and with God's illumination of our intellect (*Hep*. 4.2, 5.1, and 6.2) as well as Creator of form (*Hep*. 1.2).[38] In the *Commento* (2.17a), Pico mentions that the upper waters are the living fountain, which slakes man's thirst forever.[39] According to cabalistic teaching (e.g., *Zohar* 1.16a ff.), the light and the darkness of the first day were the "upper waters," from which the "lower waters" were separated, thanks to the largely negative sefirah known as Geburah (Force, Left). Most important to our considerations here are the general concepts of "superior" and "inferior." Pico intends in these lines to associate the three

highest angels with specific functions of the individual mind (intellection, love, and wisdom) and, at the same time, to underline their relationship to the original supernal forms of creation. God and His influences exist, above the upper waters, in a perfect state from which mortals, residents of the lower waters, may glean salvific inspiration. In order to reach the ultimate mystical union with the Godhead, we must strive to transform ourselves according to Its threefold revelation.

The following sections (§§63–72) contain a plan for our approach to the Godhead. One who wishes to realize his potential to reach a state of illumination (the second stage in Pseudo-Dionysius's tripartite path: §70) must recognize his innate capacity to imitate the function of the cherub (§71), which is the epitome of proper cognitive activity. By way of cherubic contemplation, the believer may then bring to fruition that link between love (the seraphim, Isa. 6) and justice or law (the thrones),[40] which Pico describes as the order of Pallas (§§65–66) or, we may say, the intellectual nature that leads to wisdom, inasmuch as the Orphean Pallas is associated with Metatron (the intellectual nature of man).[41] Here again the reader finds an appeal to the transcendent powers of philosophy, this time wrought with allusions to a later phase of Neoplatonic mystical thought. There is a long tradition of seeing the cherubim as ideal representatives of studied contemplation, especially among the Christian mystics of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries;[42] hence the evocation of Moses (§64), who is the contemplative exemplar of the acceptance of God's ways (i.e., laws and judgment), and, by extension, Paul (§69).[43] Pico's use of these two figures, one from the Old Testament and one from the New, is in no way haphazard. Moses, as the author of the Pentateuch, was the most important prophet and the one who best exemplified the internalization of God's will; Paul, the principal single author of the New Testament, could be seen to be Moses's anagogical double. Both succeeded in communing directly with God, and both sought to teach His ways to others. Indeed, the link between the two was made quite explicit as long ago as the works of Gregory of Nyssa. The mystical union of the soul with God is the responsibility of all who would be followers of Moses (§102). Just how this is implemented, however, has been the subject of numerous theological approaches. Pico returns through Paul to the Areopagite (§70), whose insistence on the boundless

significance of hierarchies is in perfect harmony with his own perception. "If one talks then of hierarchy," Pseudo-Dionysius writes, "what is meant is a certain perfect arrangement, an image of the beauty of God which sacredly works out the mysteries of its own enlightenment in the orders and levels of understanding of the hierarchy, and which is likened toward its own sources as much as is permitted" (Pseudo-Dionysius 1987, *Celestial Hierarchy* 165b–c).

Pico responded with great enthusiasm both to the notion that the role of the supernal angels was to assist man in his ambitious struggle for perfection and to the similarities between this hierarchy and the rather more detailed chain of being, or gradation of emanations, that is of such profound meaning in the cabalistic texts. Dionysius's practical implementation of this threefold way (*Ecclesiastical Hierarchy* 536d–37a), however, is rather less inspiring than Pico's. In §§71–72, one of the most thought-provoking sections of the *Oration*, Pico overlays on Dionysius's threefold path a surprisingly less mystical process than one might expect: dialectics is related to purification, natural philosophy to illumination, and theology to perfection. Whereas previous generations had hotly debated the role of dialectics (one need only think of the antagonistic relationship between Abelard's dialectics and Bernard of Clairvaux's mysticism), Pico syncretically embraces the best of the *Logica antiqua* and *Logica modernorum*. Indeed, Abelard's willingness to consider seriously the truths present in non-Christian traditions is embraced in the *Oration* alongside the mystical tendencies of the Cistercians and the Franciscans.[44] What emerges is a mode of thought that seems to succeed in blending Neoplatonism and Aristotelian Scholasticism quite productively (§§90–93). One of the most remarkable aspects of Pico's system lies in its openness both to Aristotelian concepts, such as those of Aquinas or Duns Scotus, while simultaneously admitting Augustinian ideas, such as those of Bonaventure or Henry of Ghent. Dialectics, Pico promises, will cut through sophistic reasoning, and natural philosophy will provide all the knowledge required to begin the process of theological enlightenment. Just how the mechanisms of intellectual cognition were to play out and whether this theology was based on reason or revelation remained to be seen, we must imagine, during the great debate. One could well argue that this superposition on Dionysius of dialectics and natural philosophy privileged the Aristotelians or, on account

of the conflict between the plurality of divine ideas and the unity of divine essence, put Pico uncomfortably close to Averroes's theories on the "unity of intellect";[45] however, there is more than enough space here in the passage from illumination to perfection to fit in any number of ideas from Proclus or Ficino.[46] We may come to an even fuller appreciation of this strategy by considering *Conclusiones* 2.11.66, in which (despite an unclear order) Pico lists the sefirot as he adapted them to the soul: the first is associated with unity; the second with intellect; the third with reason. Such a representation appears to suggest the following relationships: unity-perfection-theology-thrones; intellect-illumination-natural philosophy-cherubim; reason-purification-dialectics-seraphim. Clearly, something is missing. Even if we were to assign Pico's fourth sefirah ("superior sensual passion") to the seraphim and move the first sefirah to the level of God, this scheme would still be less than convincing.[47] What he loses in inconsistency of rigid epistemological systems, however, he makes up for with flexible allegory ("*per figuram*").

Sections 73–82 recall for the reader the multifaceted allegorical figure of Jacob's ladder (Gen. 28:11–17), here employed by Pico as a logical metaphor for our way to God. The ladder is an image long embraced in the readings of Pico's entire audience, from Hebrew midrashim and cabalistic treatises on the Tree of Life to Christian mystical texts and Islamic accounts of the Night of the Mi'rāj. Access to this path, however, is restricted to those who are "pure" and "prepared." Purification and preparation signify respectively the absolute renunciation of earthly desires and the assiduous pursuit of intellectual and spiritual readiness for the soul. But how may we approach the ladder? The feet of the unenlightened are sullied by base sensual desires, and his hands are stained with self-serving destructive aggression (§§75–77). Once the hands and feet are washed clean by moral philosophy, they are transformed from hindrances to advantages.[48] The potential cleansing or redemption of desire was explained by Pico himself in his *Commento* on the fifth stanza. What is most important to note in this imagery is that God has given us the tools to use our innate affective and intellectual powers so that we may ascend, rather than descend, the ladder that leads up to the supernal essence (§66). This ladder, for someone like Pico, who so profoundly appreciates the allegory of hierarchy (and the

hierarchy of allegory), may be variously interpreted. It might stand for the soul's participation in the gradations of creation just as well as for the orderly progression of its perfection.[49] Just as in Genesis (28:12–13), and as in Dante's *Paradiso* (22.61–75) for that matter, the ladder is highly specific *ad litteram* but amply inclusive *ad allegoriam*. What emerges with the greatest clarity in this discussion is the notion that downward movement along the ladder's rungs leads to chaos, and upward movement to unity (§82). The dismemberment of Osiris suggests the centrifugal powers of strife, whereas the Apollonian unifying force would stand for the capacity of well-directed love to draw the soul upward toward God.

Sections 83–97 are dedicated to the preparation of the soul and, once perfected, to its union with God. Pico's references to the inherently troublesome nature of lived existence (§§87–89) are thematically very appropriate to the imagery he has just reproduced from Genesis, including the presence of the cherubim, and to the appearance here in the text of Job. If Jacob's ladder is primarily illustrative of the righteous use of the sensual appetite (the spectrum that runs from *luxuria* to *caritas*), Job's identification of God's heavenly peace surely addresses the proper use of our intellectual and active faculties. Empedocles, then, is very well suited to an "exegesis" of Job, insofar as the spectrum that complements the one just mentioned would run from strife to friendship. "Friendship" in this context should be understood both as a form of *caritas* and as the general force of harmonious attraction (much discussed by Empedocles and analyzed by Aristotle [*Met*. 985a20–30]), which, in Pico, translates into that energy which encourages the soul toward its union with God. The soul, which has a natural faculty for friendship (1 Sam. 18:1), is always drawn upward toward the highest good, which is in itself tranquil and peaceful. It may profitably be noted at this point that, according to the cabalistic interpretation of the cosmogony of Genesis, great discord arose between Hesed (Mercy) and Geburah (Force) upon the separation of the upper and lower waters, and the conflict was quelled by the establishment of the firmament between them (e.g., *Zohar* 1.17a–18a). Moses drew on the story of this conflict to make peace between Korah and Aaron when the two came to blows over the latter's monopoly of the Levite priesthood (Num. 16–17). Lasting peace was established only after wrath was transformed into love. Essential in this process is the notion of Peace, or spiritual tranquillity, whose attainment is

prerequisite to the defeat of the inner desires and earthly appetites that contaminate our soul. This spiritual calm, produced not only through dialectics and natural philosophy but especially through the study of theology, is the loftiest goal of each individual and should be desired both for oneself and for all mankind. This is the Pythagorean “friendship” that characterizes the beginning and the end, the return of the soul from its mortal exile.[50] Once the soul is purified and prepared, Pico explains, it will ascend to the heavens and, like a bride, be wedded to God. The sensuality of §§93–97 obviously derives in great measure from the Song of Songs, which was highly influential both to the Christian mystical tradition and to cabalistic interpretation. Pico unites the *sponsa Christi* of the former with the Shekhinah of the latter to form an image easily recognizable by those familiar with either motif. Ultimately, the successful bride-soul releases its grip on mortality and consigns itself to wondrous death: “Let us also, therefore, choose this kind of death, as also the Apostle says, that ‘we may die to sin, but live to God’” (Origen 1982, 172–73, *Eleventh Homily on Genesis*, quoting Rom. 6:10).[51]

In §§98–102, Pico extends the metaphorical image of the soul’s path of enlightenment to the biblical descriptions of the tabernacle that Moses had built in the wilderness as a place of worship for the Israelites (Exod. 26:27, 35–38). Like the ladder, the tabernacle is another of the most enduring symbols of the contemplative’s path to enlightenment; it had been used for centuries to illustrate the progress of the soul and/or the mind toward its ultimate goal.[52] Richard of St. Victor devoted an immense amount of energy to the application of this analogy in his *De arca mystica*, and by the time we reach Bonaventure, the imagery seems to be quite taken for granted (*Itinerarium mentis in Deum* 3.1 and 5.1). The *Zohar* speaks of an upper and a lower Tabernacle (cf. 2.130a, 2.159a, 234b, 239b–240a, 3.114b), associating the former with the Tabernacle of Metatron, which symbolizes the Shekhinah, and the latter with the hidden Tabernacle of Binah. In almost every instance of the tabernacle allegory, access to the structure’s inner areas is restricted to varying degrees – as in the Bible – depending on one’s level of holiness. Likewise, the soul is granted proximity to God in accordance with its level of purity and perfection. In Pico’s scheme, those who have not begun this process must remain outside the tabernacle; partial

access is granted to those who have embraced only dialectics and moral philosophy; the final vision of the Godhead is obtained at the centre of the tabernacle by those who, beyond dialectics and moral philosophy, have dedicated themselves to theology as well. The most important aspect of this segment is Pico's allegorical division of the place of worship into three stages, each corresponding to a level of personal perfection. This is an interesting twist to the physical hierarchy of holy places that is presented in the Bible and to the Pseudo-Dionysian path to enlightenment on which Pico built so much in the preceding paragraphs. Particularly useful to a full understanding of §§98–102 is an often overlooked passage in Maimonides' *Guide of the Perplexed* (3.51), which offers so many close parallelisms to Pico's allegory of the tabernacle that one is tempted to call it a source. In Maimonides (1995), the prince and his castle are representative of God and the tabernacle:

> Those who are outside the city are all those human beings who possess no religious belief whatsoever, be it of a speculative or of a traditional nature. […] These are like the animals devoid of reason. […] Those who are in the city but turn their backs to the prince's palace are men of thought and speculation who have arrived at false opinions, be this due to some major error that crept into their reasoning or to their acceptance of erroneous ideas of others. […] Those who are making for the palace and aim at entering it, but have never seen the palace yet, are the great mass of those who obey the Law, or in other words the "men without learning who occupy themselves with religious duties." Those who have arrived at the palace and are walking round it are those possessed of religious learning, who accept the right opinions as traditional beliefs and study the detailed ordinances of the works demanded in the service of God, but have never made an attempt to speculate on the principles of their faith or inquired in any way into the justification of any item of faith. Those who have embarked on speculation concerning the principles of religion have entered the forecourts. […] Those, finally, who have succeeded in obtaining demonstrative proof of everything that can be demonstratively proved, and have reached certainty with regard to all those metaphysical matters on which certainty can be reached, and have almost reached

> certainty wherever no more than this was possible, those, I say, have penetrated to the presence of the prince in the inner parts of the palace.

Maimonides concludes the metaphor notably, like Pico, by distilling these various levels of initiation into three. The first corresponds to Pico's description of dialectics (§99): "As long as you are occupied with the mathematical sciences and the technique of logic, you belong to those who walk around the palace in search of the gate" (Maimonides 1995, 186). The second corresponds to Pico's description of those who, employing dialectics, put themselves at the service of philosophy (§100): "As soon as you learn the natural sciences you enter the palace and pass through its forecourts" (Maimonides 1995, 186). The third corresponds to the theological contemplation of the divine (§101): "When you complete your study of the natural sciences and get a grasp of metaphysics, you enter unto the prince *into the inner courtyard* (Ezek. 44:21, 27) and have achieved to be in the same house as he" (Maimonides 1995, 186).[53] Though Maimonides' extended allegory deals superficially with the Prince and His palace, his own reference to the tabernacle in Ezekiel draws a perfect correspondence with those instructions of Moses mentioned in the *Oration*. In Pico, the outermost area of the Temple is that of the unclean or the common people, and the Levites are responsible for the sanctuary (see Num. 1:47–53, 3:5–10, 18:1–7; Ezek. 44:15–17, etc.). At the centremost area of the Temple, that part administered by the descendants of Aaron, is located the "velum" ("without any veil of a likeness coming in between," §101), behind which one finds himself in God's direct presence. In the first proem to the *Heptaplus*, Pico explains that Moses was entirely illuminated by the Divine Light but revealed to men the truths according to their ability to comprehend them (cf. Ps. 118:11; 1 Cor. 5:11), an idea that is certainly present in these paragraphs, too. Similarly, in the *Heptaplus*'s second proem, Pico expounds on the figure of Moses's tabernacle as a tripartite configuration of the world structured according to levels of attainable comprehension: the highest level (or innermost area) is that which theologians call "angelic" and philosophers call "intelligible"; the middle level is the celestial world; and the lower is the sublunary world that we inhabit. The outermost area described in §99 corresponds to the "lower waters" of creation or the "sublunary world." In §100, Pico refers to the zone of the firmament where the seven planets are situated. Known as the

"celestial world," or חשמים (*hashamayim*) in Hebrew, it corresponds to that region above the inhabited world and below the supercelestial. The Holy of Holies of §101 is comparable to the supernal world inhabited by God and the three highest orders of angels. These three worlds are symbolized by Moses's instructions regarding the construction of the tabernacle. Pico insists on this series of similes, as he himself tells us, because through them man is able to recognize his path to a union with God. It was with the sight of the Spirit (i.e., through intellectual or intuitive cognition combined with theological enlightenment) that Moses and Paul saw God without any veil of a likeness coming in between them.[54] This is the same task that awaits anyone who wishes to scale the ladder, prepare a dwelling-place in his soul for God, become one with the Mind above all minds, draw together Osiris's limbs, die in the bliss of the plenitude of life, or be received within the Prince's palace.

§§103–41 (Saverio Marchignoli)

The first, very elegant part of Pico's *Oration* – that dedicated to the assertion of the dignity of man and the praise of philosophy – ends with the present sections, in which the author systematically extends his inquiry to nonbiblical sources ("not only the Mosaic and Christian mysteries…," §103). His aim here is to provide evidence supporting the universal recognition of the *tripartite philosophy* that he would like to discuss in front of the "Fathers" in Rome (the very term *tripartita philosophia* appears precisely in this section, §115). Such evidence is supplied by the interpretation of the language of the mysteries in which the texts of the "theology of the ancients" (*priscorum theologia*) were supposed to have been preserved. Pico starts with a rather general nod to the Greek (Eleusinian) mysteries, in which he again refers to the Pseudo-Dionysian model of the three stages of spiritual progression: purification (moral philosophy and dialectics), illumination (natural philosophy), and perfection (theology, which culminates in the mystical vision called *epopteia*). Then, in §§109–13, he adapts Plato's doctrine of the four divine μανίαι (*maníai*) "frenzies" (or *divini furores*, following the terminology in Ficino's 1457 letter to his long-time friend Pellegrino Agli) to his *tripartita philosophia*. Poetic madness is linked to moral philosophy and dialectics, mystical

madness to natural philosophy, and the last two madnesses – the prophetic and the erotic – to theology. This passage is particularly elaborate and refined, for it reflects a major concern in Pico's thought: Pico was not only working on the *Commento sopra una canzona de amore* but also planning to develop it into a commentary on Plato's *Symposium*. The same interpretational process is then applied to the three Delphic precepts, "Nothing too much," "Know thyself," and "You are," which are easily reconnected to these three stages of the spiritual life. In §§120–23, Pico points to the Pythagorean "symbols" as further evidence for his *tripartita philosophia*, which in §§130–35 is recognized in the writings of the "Chaldeans" as well. Finally, after a meaningful allusion to Abraham (originating from the land of the Chaldeans) in §§140–41, Pico uses the names of the most eminent archangels of traditional angelology in order to expound his tripartite scheme still further. With the mention of Raphael ("God heals"), Gabriel ("God is strong"), and Michael ("Who is like God?"), Pico rejoins the biblical tradition, thus circularly closing the section.

Paul O. Kristeller once wrote that "in studying the sources of Pico's thought, we are not merely pursuing a task that is potentially interesting for an understanding of his work, but are actually following up one of the basic notions of Pico's own philosophy" (Kristeller 1965, 41). Such an affirmation would prompt us to seek, whenever possible, all of Pico's sources, a task that proves particularly difficult for the *Oration* and the *Conclusiones*, replete as they are with references to unusual or even unknown works and authors.[55] Such an endeavour, while always intriguing, is particularly tempting in the enigmatic allusions of these sections in particular. On account of the abovementioned risks of pursuing such a strategy, however, we have here limited ourselves to tracing the actual sources underlying the complex texture of Pico's work, thus distinguishing them from other possible, but more remote, sources. For instance, the distant source of §§109–13 is obviously Plato's (1990) *Phaedrus* 265b, "And we made four divisions of the divine madness, ascribing them to four gods, saying that prophecy was inspired by Apollo, the mystic madness by Dionysus, the poetic by the Muses, and the madness of love […] by Aphrodite and Eros," and Pico certainly knew Ficino's Latin translation of the passage. But the order in which Pico lists the four *furores* in the *Oration*

suggests even more convincingly that his actual direct source in this case was not this passage in Plato but Ficino's interpretation of it in the final pages of his *Commentarium in* Convivium *Platonis*. While some sources may have been recognized here for the first time (such as the quotation of Paul's Letter to the Hebrews in §112 or the reference to the letter *De divino furore* in §113), the chief crux of these sections is still to be found in the references to the "writings of the Chaldeans" (§130). Unfortunately, the nature of Pico's "Chaldean" sources still remains unclear. A closer examination of the Greek "Chaldean Oracles" (including Psellus's exegesis) may be helpful in explaining some of these intricacies, but we would likely still be left without a real solution to the problem itself.

As for the Latin text, it must be emphasized that, as opposed to other editions, the lacunae corresponding to the "Chaldean" names of the rivers of Paradise (§134) have not been provided by Bausi. The Hebrew names that appear in most sixteenth-century editions, and that pass thence into modern editions, are in fact taken from Gen. 2:11–15, but such conjectural shortcuts are incompatible with the translations in Pico's possession. This omission of names ultimately appears fully justified, especially in the light of the only extant (partial) manuscript of the *Oration*, in which we find a possible trace of the "Chaldean writings" with which Pico was familiar. Finally, it must be noted that some of the *variae lectiones* preserved in this manuscript and accepted in Bausi's text are quite remarkable: among these, the reader should take note of the phrase *sacratissimum deorum cultum* ("most holy worship of the gods") of §135, which replaces the usual *sacratissimum Dei cultum* ("most holy worship of God"). The nature of Pico's hermeneutic attitude toward nonbiblical sources is a major, controversial topic. It would seem from this and other similar details that a profound change in Pico's attitude took place after the failure of the projected disputation in Rome and his subsequent condemnation in 1487. Indeed, a more apologetic Christian pattern, with regard to both pagan and Hebrew sources, prevailed during Pico's last years in Florence under Savonarola's influence (1491–94).

But what can be said about Pico's attitude in 1486, the year in which the *Conclusiones*, the *Oration*, and the *Commento* were composed? Here we

witness a full-scale use of Neoplatonic symbolic patterns within the framework represented by the *prisca theologia* and the continuous intermingling of biblical and nonbiblical sources. Pico seems to be so deeply absorbed in his “project of concord” that he is capable of speaking many different “languages” simultaneously (Pier Cesare Bori has rightly emphasized Pico’s “bilingualism”). Such a linguistic fusion assumes the existence of a “mysteric” level at which the secret meaning of all theological texts simply awaits the interpreter’s illuminating exegesis. In this sense, Pico (as well as Ficino, though in a somewhat different fashion) goes a step further in the process of transforming the “ritual mysteries” into “literary mysteries,” which some scholars (e.g., Festugière, Wind) have brilliantly identified as a deeply significant characteristic of the Neoplatonic movement. The presupposition of a “mysteric” level common to biblical and nonbiblical texts ended up being a sanctification of the latter, thus inaugurating a hermeneutic attitude that would develop in its own way, independently from the late positions of the Florentine Platonists and despite the severe judgments of the subsequent generation (including Pico’s own nephew, Gianfrancesco).

§§142–70 (Giorgio Melloni, Michael Papio, and Massimo Riva)

In these sections, Pico strongly defends his vocation for philosophical studies, the dignity implicit in pursuing the love of wisdom (*philo-sophia*), and the right to engage in public debate in order to defend his own opinions. He does so following and copiously quoting illustrious examples from classical (Greek and Roman) antiquity. This praise of philosophy can perhaps be considered the leitmotif of the entire *Oration*.

According to Bori (2000, 30–31), the original nucleus of these sections can be found in the second half of the manuscript P (Palatino 885), §§25–31, in which Pico stresses two essential points: that a thorough knowledge of sources is necessary to the apprentice philosopher and that disputation is beneficial even when one’s argument is defeated. Again according to Bori’s general hypothesis on the composition of the *Oration*, the defence of philosophy and the contemplative life contained in these sections was added later. Datable to mid-October of 1486 (when Pico took refuge in the castle

of Fratta after the Margherita episode), it closely follows the letter to Andreas Corneus, also written during the same period (along with the *Commentary on a Love Song by Girolamo Benivieni*). As Bori notes, this entire group of sections reflects Pico's anxiety over the upcoming public debate on his nine hundred theses, an anxiety intensified by Corneus's reproach that Pico has unduly abandoned the active life (an accusation to which Pico replies in his letter). Later on, some themes expressed in these sections will be repeated and expanded in Pico's *Apologia* (published in Naples in 1487 after the failure of the Roman disputation), in which Pico defends himself from the accusations of heterodoxy levelled at him by the pope's theologians. The relevant sections of the *Apologia* (A), as well as those of the manuscript (P), are extensively quoted in the footnotes in order to allow a close comparison among the various drafts.

Pico begins this group of sections by providing several arguments in his own defence, focusing on the *duty* he felt to engage in the study of philosophy, including the study of those heterogeneous sources of ancient wisdom discussed in the preceding passage (Chaldean Oracles and cabalistic doctrines). The models he follows here are classical – Cicero, in particular (*On Moral Ends*, *De Oratore*, and *De Republica* primarily, but also the *Tusculan Disputations*, in which we find the etymological definition of philosophy as disinterested love of wisdom, on which Pico insists). The reference to Cicero's definition ("wisdom is the knowledge of things divine and human, together with an understanding of each thing's cause" – Augustine provides another similar source) is consistent with the inspiration for the whole *Oration*. Here again, Pico outlines the ascending path to truth, the three (or, according to Bausi, four) stages through which the journey toward wisdom must pass: from the knowledge of earthly phenomena to that of celestial and divine manifestations, up to the supreme cause, or principle of the universe. This confirms Pico's fundamental position in the *Oration* vis-à-vis theology, that philosophy is not absorbed by theology: "Pico extols the dignity of the contemplative-philosophical stage within a plurality of diverse and parallel spiritual itineraries" (Bori 2000, 63).[56]

Yet the practice of philosophy is now disparaged, Pico laments, and even this sublime knowledge is degraded, measured only against the material profit it can produce for its practitioners. The pursuit of wisdom is nowadays reduced to a career, a business similar to that of merchants, and therefore supposedly inappropriate for a nobleman like him. The rhetorical pitch of the *Oration* here reaches a climax. The simile used, without euphemism, is prostitution. Pallas Athena (the personification of philosophy, and for Pico, in particular, a symbol of the universal intellect) is forced to parade naked, "like a prostitute who accepts a pittance for her deflowered virginity" (§155). The source of this image is most likely Petrarch (*RVF* 7.10–11), while Petrarch's *Invectiva Contra Medicum*, full of piercing expressions against the pseudophilosophers of his time, is also a text Pico may have had in mind. With the aim of restoring his own image as that of a disinterested searcher for truth, consumed by a compelling desire to pursue wisdom at all costs, Pico goes so far as to renounce (in part) his patrimonial rights and states that he has given himself over entirely to the contemplative life, thus fully embracing the Aristotelian thesis of its superiority over the active life (*Nicomachean Ethics* 10.7). We can hear in his words the echo of a Petrarchan-Augustinian leitmotif (*De vita solitaria*) – for that matter, the opposition between the active and contemplative life gives rise to lively debates in other key humanistic texts of the Quattrocento, such as, for example, Landino's *Disputations at Camaldoli*.[57] Yet this opposition, which is also the counterposition between the civic and mercantile culture of the Florentine commune, on the one hand, and the rising aristocratic courtly culture, epitomized by the Medicean circle, on the other, is not absolute in the fifteenth century. Thus, Bori detects a Socratic theme in Pico's apology (namely, a reference to Plato's *Apology of Socrates*) and evokes the figure of the Platonic Socrates in order to exemplify how Pico's own vocation for philosophical studies and his readiness to publicly debate his ideas are "not without a civic relevance" (Bori 2000, 77).

Next, Pico moves on to sing the praises of disputations, a formal practice common in scholastic circles and universities. Yet, one is uncertain whether to consider Pico's plan to discuss his ideas about universal peace "before a vast assembly of learned men and in the presence of the apostolic senate" as

the last in a long line of ecumenical councils of Church Fathers (those Pico addresses, in the *Oration*, as “most reverend”) or the very first international conference of scientists. Later, in the *Apologia*, written, as we know, after the debate was called off, Pico redefines his intended audience, speaking of a “secret meeting among a few learned men” (cf. Farmer 1998, 9). Here, in this portion of the *Oration*, Pico defends himself against the accusation of presumptuousness, of daring, at only twenty-four years of age, “to propose a discussion on the sublime mysteries of Christian theology, the most profound questions of philosophy and unexplored fields of knowledge” (§164). One cannot entirely blame his critics for harbouring such thoughts. Again, however, it is in the name of philosophy that Pico defends himself, arguing in favour of the practice of disputation, in which the “eminent doctors” of the Church “have engaged quite often (and not without high honour and praise)” and in which “also […] Plato, Aristotle and all the most revered philosophers of every age” have engaged. Finally, he calls on Plato in order to remind the reader that jealousy must be “excluded from the divine chorus” (*Phaedrus* 247a). In short, disputation “sharpens the intellect,” argues Pico, quoting Talmudic sources in support of this central point. It is worth noting that the tradition of public disputations focused mainly on debates between Christian theologians and Jewish Rabbis, yet another instance in which Pico aims to show how all major philosophical and theological traditions converge in the search for the truth, at least in method, if not in substance.

Interestingly enough, and almost in contradiction with himself (with both his fundamental message of universal peace and his later criticism of astrology), Pico even includes an astrological reference in his argument extolling the need for philosophical debates, as though to suggest, indirectly, that his own destiny as a philosopher, as well as his idea of a public disputation, was written in the stars: in the horoscope of philosophers, in the threefold conjunctions of Mars and Mercury, inasmuch as Mars symbolically represents the need for “conflict” (i.e., disputation as a *gymnasium* of the mind).

Finally, Pico recuses himself rhetorically from defending his right to engage in such a battle at such a young and (according to his critics)

immature age. However, he then quotes biblical (Old Testament) sources in defence of youth and bellicosely claims for himself not the title of scholar but that of a “soldier” (of truth, one could add), albeit an admittedly “weak” one. Indeed, he points out that even those who are defeated will benefit from debating since “there is profit in defeat.” This is a statement that, harkening back to classical antiquity, may well apply not only to theological disputes but also to such modern contraptions as democracy and experimental science (Karl Popper *docet*). If the goal is our search for truth, then the real enemies of truth, however we choose to define it, are those who refuse to put their own ideas and beliefs to the test of dialogue and debate; in other words, those who do not submit to human reason. Such faith in reason is based in turn on the conviction that our intellectual pursuits, beyond our religious and philosophical convictions, are all rooted in the one universal intellect that governs all things.

§§171–233 (Dino Buzzetti)

This group of sections begins with the last argument of Pico’s self-vindication in the face of the criticisms raised against the proposal of a public disputation of his nine hundred theses. In his opinion, there is no cogent reason to argue against the high number of his theses or against his young age, for, on the contrary, in both cases his attempt would be praiseworthy even in the case of defeat. Far from being needless and audacious, his endeavour is timely and appropriate: a close examination of all positions and a suitable comparison of all philosophical doctrines and schools are absolutely vital to genuine philosophical inquiry. Accordingly, Pico carries on with a detailed enumeration of the several authors whose theses he lists in the first half of his nine hundred *Conclusiones*, where he represents the doctrines shared by different schools and cultural traditions. He follows the same order of the theses in mentioning first the Latins, or the Western medieval philosophers who wrote their works in Latin, followed by the Arabs and the Greeks. Conforming to a classical rhetorical model, Pico associates with each name in his survey a particular quality that vividly portrays the author’s work. In Pico’s mind, the merits of the comparison of different schools and opinions deserve to be vigorously emphasized. The truth can shine through only in the discussion of diverse positions because

the wisdom of the latest thinkers is deeply rooted in the traditions of their predecessors, the Arabs and the Greeks, and because the Greeks themselves inherited the wisdom of the barbarians. Hence, no one can be content with just one opinion or refrain from appealing to other sources. Pico has extended his examination to the testimonies of the *prisca theologia*, the ancient theology of the Hermetic, Pythagorean, and Chaldean traditions, but comprehensive as such an approach may be, no scrutiny of the many different doctrines can substitute for a more direct and personal inquiry, such as the one Pico presents in the second part of his nine hundred theses. He proceeds therefore to describe concisely the conclusions drawn according to his own opinion and ascribes to his own merits a demonstration of the agreement between Plato and Aristotle, which many others had merely taken for granted. Pico also insists on an attempt to show the agreement among some conclusions by Scotus and Aquinas, and likewise the harmony among certain contentions of Averroes and Avicenna. The other major ability he claims for himself is that of deriving any conclusion whatsoever on natural and metaphysical matters from completely different principles than are commonly taught in schools of his time. His is, furthermore, a new philosophy that deserves to be judged for its own worth rather than by his young age.

At this point in the *Oration*, Pico feels obliged to account for the inclusion of the somewhat remarkable areas of inquiry that he has included in his collected theses. Each of them requires a rather detailed explanation. He deals in the first place with the art of numbers, which, he contends, offers a novel method by which to prove philosophical truths, and mentions the ancient theologians and all the philosophers, from Pythagoras onward, who were conversant with it. He insists in particular on Plato, without failing, however, to refer to Aristotle and the Arabs as well. The last part of the present section is devoted to an illustration of magic, which Pico presents as the highest and most perfect form of wisdom and natural philosophy. In this lengthy exposition, he sharply distinguishes between two forms of magic, one that scarcely deserves attention and another, nobler one, which has been identified since the most ancient times with the knowledge of things divine. The first was disregarded by wise men and condemned by religion and civil laws, whereas the second was sought after by philosophers and cultivated by the forerunners of the Pythagorean and

Zoroastrian traditions. The latter was praised by Plato, the Arabs, and the Schoolmen, but it is to Plotinus in particular that Pico refers in his explanation of how this noble form of magic can lead to the profoundest knowledge of the inner workings of the powers of nature. The kind of comprehensive and concise summary of the content of his nine hundred theses that Pico provides here involves a very large number of references to philosophical sources and doctrines.

The chief purpose of the notes for this group of sections was that of documenting their import and provenance. Where the reference is not literal but conjectural, it is accompanied by the indication of the commentators who have suggested it. The notes often contain quotations from the textual sources in order to help the reader to understand their use in Pico's hands as well as his intended interpretation. The other notes supplied are mainly historical. The amount of information provided is inversely proportionate to the renown of the persons and subjects there described. Particular attention has been paid to lesser-known historical characters and unusual terms; in those cases, some care has been taken in gathering information otherwise scattered and dispersed in different or not easily available sources. Pico's direct references are selective and deliberate, and full acquaintance with them helps in the clarification of his intentions. The text of the present portion of the *Oration* may be profitably compared both with an earlier draft, preserved in the manuscript of Florence's Biblioteca Nazionale and known as Palatino 885 (fols. 143–153), and with Pico's *Apologia*, a self-defence written after the prohibition of the public discussion of his nine hundred theses and the formal condemnation of some specific points contained therein. A synopsis of the divergent passages of the *Oration* and the Palatino manuscript was first published by Pier Cesare Bori and Saverio Marchignoli,[58] and a complete collation is comprised in the appendix to Francesco Bausi's 2003 edition, where a list of the additions to the portion of the text included in the *Apologia* is also to be found.[59] The most significant variants of the earlier draft are reported here in the notes. References to the corresponding sections of the *Conclusiones* are also included.

In his praise of philosophy, Pico has shown that its ultimate goal is the attainment of peace, the friendship of all souls in their spiritual unity with God's one mind (§94). By showing that philosophical practice and meditation consist in one's preparation for the plenitude of life that holy peace alone can bestow on us (§97), Pico has justified his intention to devote himself entirely to the exercise of philosophy (§142). In this part of the text, his main concern becomes that of describing his quest for philosophical truth and defending his method of inquiry alongside the paths to philosophical wisdom that he has envisaged in opposition to the severe and unfair criticisms levelled against his endeavour. Pico's methodology refuses any indiscriminate allegiance to authority and admits only independent inquiry; he explicitly identifies his conscience as the sole judge of his opinions (§150). Determined as he is not to put his trust in the opinions of others, he boldly declares his intention to become acquainted with all doctrines and all schools (§180). He argues that a thorough examination of all philosophical positions is required not only to avoid error and unwarrantable contentions but also to discover that part of the truth which is to be found in any given philosophical doctrine or tradition (§§184–85). Consequently, the comparison of different positions (§192) appears to be the only criterion that can ensure independent thinking and promote genuine research.

Pico sees philosophical practice as a matter of personal commitment and concern (§142). He is convinced that it is only through philosophy and contemplation that man can ascend to a state of passionate ardour and spiritual union with the all-embracing Divine Mind, and afterward be prepared to descend again in order to strive, with full awareness, toward peace and friendship in the earthly world (§66). He is therefore unable to renounce direct personal inquiry and necessarily must find his own way to the truth, by himself and within himself (§197). Pico's confidence in his own direct quest for truth both leads him to claim that the solution to any philosophical question whatsoever can be established by means of his new inventive principles and allows him to aver the introduction of an altogether "new philosophy" (§§206–7). On the grounds of his new principles, Pico feels entitled to declare that he has not only suggested, as many others had done, but even proved the compatibility of Plato and Aristotle (§200).

Indeed, beyond Aristotle and Plato, he similarly affirms agreement between Scotus and Aquinas and between Averroes and Avicenna (§205). Pico devotes a special group of his nine hundred *Conclusiones* to the concordance between philosophical positions commonly held to be divergent and dissonant. Clearly, concord is one of Pico's major concerns. In maintaining the harmony between Plato and Aristotle, he finds himself very much in accordance with the ancient Neoplatonic tradition. Plotinus had openly said that his teachings were "no novelties" and only amounted to the interpretation and explanation of earlier doctrines (*Enneads* 5.1.8) "that ranged themselves most closely to the school of Pythagoras" (5.1.9). And Pico himself quite consistently takes a similar hermeneutical stance. He traces to different sources his notion of the Protean nature of man (§§18–23, 33) and his explanation of the three stages of the mystical progression (§70): Mosaic and Christian Scriptures (§42); the doctrines of the cabalists and the Arabs (§139); Zoroastrian (§135), Chaldaean (§43), and Hermetic (§33) theology; Pythagorean doctrines (§34); and Greek mysteries (§104). All traditions rooted in ancient theology (*prisca theologia*: §199) and wisdom (*prisca sapientia*: §259) converge in conveying the same hidden doctrines (*secreta philosophia*: §263). As in the ancient Neoplatonic tradition, the exercise of philosophy then comes to reside in the hermeneutical practice of unveiling and exposing the covert meaning of earlier writings. The more Pico sees his task as challenging and new, the less he finds possible support in the works of any other interpreters or expounders. From this point of view, the ancient method of philosophizing through numbers can also be presented as new (§208). But the art of counting that he espouses in his *Conclusiones* is not to be confused with the arithmetic of the merchants (§212); it consists, on the contrary, in the divine arithmetic that Pythagoras introduced and shaped on the model of the Orphic theology (§260). And the same can be said of magic, which is to be seen as that science of things divine that Plato ascribes to Zoroaster (§223) and that Pythagoras, and all who travelled afar to learn it, held to be the most important form of arcane wisdom (§221). This higher and holier form of philosophy can lead us from the contemplation of the wonders and the most secret things of nature to religion and to the worship of God (§232), but we must guard against mistaking it for that execrable and most deceitful of arts that makes man a slave to wicked powers (§227) and has been condemned by religion and

civil laws alike (§218). Pico's task of interpreting the ancient wisdom and all the sapiential knowledge that flowed from it (§§133–34) can thus be seen in its own right as a new form of philosophizing. The novelty of his attempt to expose hidden content and to rationalize the occult doctrines handed down in the ancient teachings can thus be easily reconciled with his effort to demonstrate the profound concord and agreement of all theological and philosophical traditions that originated from them.

§§234–68 (Massimo Riva)

In this final segment of the *Oration*, Pico explains his position toward Judaism, or, as he put it, "the ancient mysteries of the Hebrews." In short, he claims to find in the Jewish tradition the confirmation of Catholic faith, as well as the very weapons with which to confute the "calumnies of the Jews" (§234). These pages must be read in close connection with the section of the *Conclusiones* that contains Pico's own "cabalistic theses," as well as with relevant passages from the *Heptaplus*, Pico's commentary on Genesis, written a couple of years later (1489). Yet Pico's assimilation and treatment of the Jewish tradition (which gained him the reputation of "Christian cabalist") are still under scrutiny and assessment by scholars, who have formulated various hypotheses about the actual sources that he may have used and the roles played by such figures as Flavius Mithridates and Yohanan Alemanno in his reading and interpretation of cabalistic texts.

The first and most important source mentioned here is actually a conflation of Esdras, Hilary, and Origen. For Pico, Esdras is a composite figure uniting the Jewish leader of the canonical Book of Ezra with the visionary from the apocryphal Greek Books of Esdras. The latter, which record the revelation received by Esdras, were conserved in the Western tradition and circulated both independently and within the compilation of the Latin Vulgate (by 1560, 2 Esdras is relegated to an appendix to the New Testament). Pico drew primarily from 2 Esdras, which was familiar to the Church Fathers he mentions; hence, it is likely that he formed his ideas more from reading this text than from any original Jewish sources. In this composite work, he finds the narrative account of how a secret explanation of the Law was given to Moses on Mount Sinai, along with the five books

of the Pentateuch (Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy); the letter of the Law contained in those books will be divulged to the people, while its explanation will remain the secret prerogative of a few God-fearing men (the *cohanim*, direct descendants of Aaron the high priest, brother of Moses) in a lineage beginning with Jesu Nave (Joshua, son of Nun), the first leader of the Jewish people after Moses, according to various biblical narratives.[60] Again, we are faced with a subtle ambivalence in Pico's argumentative strategy: on the one hand, he seems to embrace the esoteric nature of ancient traditions, including the Cabala; on the other, he wants to explain what its mysteries actually mean or at least how they should be interpreted. This ambivalence is further complicated by the difficult relation between (pagan) philosophical and (Judeo-Christian) theological exegesis in his thought. If philosophy helps clarify theological mysteries, the confirmation of theological (Christian) truths remains the ultimate goal of philosophical explanations. Indeed, Pico's treatment of the Jewish tradition, in this final portion of the *Oration*, deals directly with the distinction between esotericism and exotericism in the transmission (tradition) of all (theological) truths. This is at the core of his exegetic method and governs also what Bori has called Pico's *bilingualism*: his ability to articulate, in the most original parts of the *Oration*, a *universalistic* point of view, speaking in a *dual* language, at once theological and philosophical, capable of extending the (range of) truth and recognizing different paths to wisdom while following the path of his own Christian faith. This attitude, according to Bori, would also provide a solution to the ambivalence of esotericism and exotericism mentioned earlier: because Pico's *intensive* universalism (neither monistic nor a simple variety of syncretism) does not make philosophy ancillary to theology neither does it subordinate theology to philosophy.[61] Pico's universalism, however, remains fundamentally elitist (albeit retrospectively so). Indeed, is not the phrase "to make public to the populace the most secret mysteries and the profoundest arcana of divinity" (§237) the same as "to give holy things to the dogs and cast pearls before swine" (Matt. 7:6)? The implicit answer to this rhetorical question is yes, of course – at least until the time comes when bigotry and an acritical, dogmatic adherence to the Law can be superseded by a superior understanding of, and implicit dialogue among, different traditions (that is, different ways of articulating and interpreting

the true Law). That time has now apparently come, with Pico and his nine hundred theses.

Pico's attitude toward the Cabala, then, sums up his attitude toward *prisca theologia* as a whole. Putting the Cabala on the level of pagan (Pythagorean and Platonic) philosophy,[62] he actually treats pagan philosophy (including natural philosophy and magic, discussed in the group of sections immediately preceding this one) as a repository of "hidden wisdom" to be explained in light of Christian dogmas. Yet there is both a contemplative and a practical value in the Cabala; as stated in the *Conclusiones,* it "puts into practice all of formal metaphysics and lower theology."[63] Like Pythagorean and Platonic doctrines, the Cabala contributes to that spiritual transformation that allows man to ascend to the level of angels and beyond. According to Pico, contemplation of the True Torah transforms man into a more godlike creature like Adam (§18), transformed into the cosmic Adam Kadmon, or like Enoch (§35), who is both human and angelic in nature. Paul is the logical choice for a cabalistic model for Christians since Pauline experiences concord perfectly with the two key components of the initiation described in the *Oration*: conversion and revelation. At the moment of conversion, Paul accepted the new Law over the old Torah; therefore, for Pico, the revelation given to him must be a new Cabala and Paul the new Moses. The divine commandment that is at the origin of esotericism applies to all forms of wisdom and is a common trait of the various paths leading to it. In other words, there is a "cabalistic" trait in all traditions, including the Egyptian (the distinction between demotic writing or the common sort and the sacred writing or hieroglyphs known only to priests and scribes) and the Greek (Pythagoras, Plato, and Aristotle all to some extent wrote in enigmas or transmitted a more secret knowledge to their followers). The same can be said of the "forgotten words of Jesus," the oral wisdom entrusted to his disciples and hence left unwritten.[64]

We are here taken back to the notion of a direct revelation of the divine truth, *sine interprete*, a mystical union with the Godhead, which is also the goal of the spiritual itinerary, the last stage of the inner transformation outlined in the *Oration*. This is a paradoxical notion if ever there was one,

inasmuch as those who receive this revelation often become its interpreters, or the intermediaries for those who are (and, as we have seen, should be) excluded from it. Pico himself implicitly assumes this interpretive role in the *Conclusiones*. This is the difference between "epopteia" and "reception," which lies at the root of all traditions, a difference that cannot be reduced simply to the opposition between orality and literacy but is instead based on two communicative *and* cognitive systems: "from mind to mind" or "through the intercession of the word" (§244). Yet Pico's focus on the Cabala (in Reuchlin's definition, "receiving what is heard"[65]) as a sort of genealogical model for the "reception" and transmission of the highest form of knowledge in general bears witness to the intense exchange between Jewish and humanistic circles in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, an exchange that has increasingly attracted the attention and scrutiny of scholars in recent years.[66] This is highly significant, as even Ficino and other thinkers who were interested in the Jewish tradition never clearly distinguished Cabala from other mystical approaches. This was in part because they lacked the linguistic and theological background acquired by Pico through his studies with Jewish scholars such as Yohanan Alemanno, Elia del Medigo, and Flavius Mithridates. By working directly with Jewish thinkers, Pico not only acquired these requisite skills but was also directly introduced to a tradition that was still relatively new within Judaism since Cabala appeared around the twelfth century and became widespread among Jews only in the fourteenth (thus, we can actually speak of a development parallel to, and probably intertwined with, the rise of humanism, all within the same historical framework).[67]

As to the actual extent of Pico's knowledge of the Cabala, the jury is still out; again, the prophet Ezra is quoted in these pages as the master source of Pico's account and treatment of the Cabala's origins, against the backdrop of the reconstruction of the temple in Jerusalem and the reestablishment of the Law following the Babylonian exile. Ezra, according to the narrative in the biblical canonical writings, was scribe and leader of the Jewish congregation in Babylon. He was accorded permission to return to Jerusalem with a second group of exiles. In Jerusalem, Ezra organized the community of the Jews according to traditional Jewish Law, written down in the five Books of Moses (1 Ezra 7); upon his return to Jerusalem, he also

received from the archangel Uriel the vision that is transcribed into the seventy books (as many as the members of the Synedrion) that (according to Pico) contain "the science of the Cabala," to be handed down in its three fundamental components: "the ineffable theology of the supersubstantial deity"; "the exact metaphysics of the intelligible and angelic forms"; and "the most steadfast philosophy of natural things" (§250).[68] Notwithstanding the fact that he was then only twenty-six (and that, as he himself notes, "these books are held in such religious awe by the Jews of today that no one under the age of forty is permitted to approach them," §252), Pico aimed to acquire as many as possible, translating and studying them with the help of, among others, Flavius Mithridates (the convert Jew Guglielmo Raimondo de Moncada, who was Pico's teacher of Hebrew, Aramaic, and Arabic in 1486 and had been appointed teacher of Oriental languages at the "Studium Urbis" in Rome in 1482).

Whether we may speak of an actual "conversion" of Pico to the Cabala or simply of an apologetic attempt to "convert" the Cabala into an anti-Jewish tool of conversion[69] is still open to conjecture. Perhaps (at least as far as the *Oration* and the *Conclusiones* are concerned) one does not entirely exclude the other. There is no doubt, however, that Pico is a Christian when he writes the *Oration* and when he defends himself, in the *Apologia*, forcefully declaring: "I am not a magician, I am not a Jew, I am not an Ishmaelite, I am not a heretic, but I worship Jesus and carry Jesus' cross on my body" (preface 14). Pico sees in the cabalistic books – and God is his witness (*vidi in illis, testis est Deus*) – not the secrets of the Mosaic religion but the universal truths of Christian dogmas; he also reads in them "what we read daily in Paul, Dionysius, Jerome and Augustine."[70] In the light of his personal "epiphany," Pico claims that the teachings of the Cabala confirm Christian doctrines and dogmas and are to be considered as part of the Christian tradition as a whole. In his cabalistic *Conclusiones*, he therefore acts as an interpreter, the translator of a personal, philosophical, and theological vision. As the (natural) science of astrology teaches us how to read in the book of God (nature) – he writes – thus the Cabala teaches us how to read in the book of the Law (*Conclusiones* 2.11.72; Farmer 1998, 552). The same argument (a mixture of esotericism and exotericism) used for the Cabala is also valid for the Chaldean and Orphic mysteries, handed

down through the fragmentary teachings of Zoroaster and Pythagoras's mathematical doctrines (with the substantial difference that in Pico's day there was no significant number of followers of Orpheus or Pythagoras to be converted to the universal truth of Christianity). Nevertheless, as Bori suggestively observes, it is sometimes tempting, while reading Pico, actually to believe in the survival or rebirth of mysteries like those transmitted in the pagan initiation rites. Understanding the esoteric language of initiation and spiritual transformation implies interpreting and translating its content, its truth, disguised under the veil of poetic enigmas, into the language of Christian theology. Pico's is a highly synthetic – yet generously inclusive – philosophical reconciliation of the multiple ways in which universal (Christian) truth may be articulated. As young Pico himself provocatively declares in the final lines of the *Oration*, his principal task was to "[free] from the tangle of riddles and the obscurity of fables the meaning of this secret philosophy" (§263).

This is the hermeneutic strategy that lies at the core of Pico's "new philosophy": only through the correct (or at least doggedly coherent) interpretation of any given text – or doctrine – may its disguised truths be revealed. In this way, it is perhaps more accurate to say that Pico has developed an entire system of exegetic thought rather than "merely" a new philosophy. Yet this characteristic alone is not enough to explain the full import of Pico's many contributions. How many philosophers and theologians before (and after) him spent sleepless nights examining the texts of their predecessors through a lens that was, or genuinely seemed to them, to be wholly original? This is the age-old task of all commentators, one that Plotinus addresses in his *Enneads* (7.1):

> When, perhaps, we make the effort to clarify our ideas and close into the heart of the matter we are at once unsettled: our doubts throw us back upon ancient explanations; we choose among the various theories, or among the various interpretations of some one theory, and so we come to rest, satisfied, if only we can counter a question with an approved answer, and glad to be absolved from further enquiry. Now, we must believe that some of the venerable philosophers of old discovered the truth; but it is important to examine which of them

> really hit the mark and by what guiding principle we can ourselves attain to certitude.

What sets Pico apart from others, what at last makes his *Oration* so significant, is not simply his heartfelt desire to attain a comforting measure of "certitude"; rather, it is his equally ardent willingness (indeed, necessity) to put his theories to the test. Success is gauged not in rest but in action. However, this ambition, if we may use such a term, derives as much from his own slakeless thirst to make a contribution of his own as it does from a sense of responsibility toward his fellow man. In the first proem to the *Heptaplus*, Pico explains that he had assumed the role of exegete so that "I too might pluck for myself a few ears to place as first fruits upon the altars of the church, that I might not be shut off from the privileges of the temple like a false Israelite or one of the uninitiate." The spirited acquisition of knowledge is itself a part of man's path to perfection. For this reason, we ought to see Pico's submission of his theses to public debate both as an opportunity to test their validity and as an altruistic invitation to assist, albeit indirectly, in the self-enlightenment of all those in his learned audience.

1 There have been several attempts at identifying this unknown person. In any case, that the "manifesto of Renaissance Humanism" may begin with a coded reference to an Arabic "prophet" (as in the Palatino manuscript) who is actually a converted friar (or a converted Jew) remains a fascinating conjecture.

2 *Asclepius* 6. See also Augustine, *De civitate Dei* 10.12; Ficino, *Theologia Platonica* 14.3.

3 *Convivio* 4.19.7.

4 Cf. Bori, "Tre giardini" (1996b, 551–64); Bori (2000, 36ff.).

5 Besides Hermetic texts (e.g., *Asclepius* 8–9), this motif is present also in Lactantius (*De ira dei* 14.1) as well as Manetti (*De dignitate* 3). Cf. Bausi (Pico 2003, 7).

6 Gentile (1991, 66).

7 It is precisely for this reason, we might add, that Pico (with an eye toward Seneca's forty-first letter, to Lucilius) develops and integrates Seneca's idea of wisdom into the *Oration*. The concept of reason as a means of dominating oneself, and the whole cosmos, is expressed in Senecan terms, although the second sentence suggests, again, an upward dynamism that does not belong to Stoic usage.

8 See Marcel (1958, 664ff.). On Ficino's concept of human dignity, see Vasoli (1999, 74–89).

9 To reinforce this "contamination" of a Platonic and biblical archetype in the *Oration*, we may remember that Origen, in a work translated into Latin in 1481 by Cristoforo Persona (*Contra Celsum*), had already recognized in the Platonic myth of the *Symposium* a reflection of the Creation story told in Genesis (with Póros identified with Adam and Penía with the serpent). For Pico's attitude toward Origen, see *Conclusiones* 1.29.29 (Farmer 1998, 434–35). See also Wind (1983, 44): "Although [Pico's] doctrine is not identical with Origen's in any detail, they have in common the assumption that man's place in the universe is not fixed, that he is able to move freely, up and down, between the angelic and the animal spheres, belonging to both and bound to neither." See also Wind (1965, 197ff.).

10 In this passage, Ficino comments on *Symposium* 203.

11 Pico (1942, 501). Pico's thesis 2.5.21 (Farmer 1998, 444–45) also speaks of the *hortus Jovis* ("the garden of Jove [Zeus]").

12 See §30.

13 The following sentence by Pico's friend and patron Lorenzo de' Medici (from the *Commentary on His Own Sonnets*, also written in the 1480s and possibly a model for Pico's own *Commentary on a Love Song by Girolamo Benivieni*) seems to echo the dynamic meaning of "happiness," based on a long classical tradition, from Plato to Boethius, on whose celebration this section of the *Oration* opens: "All men are born with a natural appetite for happiness, and all human actions are directed toward it as their true goal" (Pico 1992, 605, translation mine). For the anthropological tradition, see Buck (1997, 1:6ff.).

14 The copious references to Patristic sources, underscored by the majority of commentators, should not overshadow the real emphasis of the *Oration*. When they speak of animal metamorphoses, for example, the Church Fathers and monastic authors (perhaps with the exception of such mystic authors as St. Bernard) generally speak in the negative, emphasizing the nature of the Fall and portraying a true (allegorical and theological) "menagerie" of human degradation into a variety of animals, according to various sins. Many (e.g., St. Thomas Aquinas) add as a corollary the demonic corruption of the imaginative and rational faculties of man. Pico instead is focused on extolling the transcendent possibilities of chameleon-like human nature and imagination.

15 Cf. Copenhaver (2002a, 59): "[A]t the peak of a climb that starts with free choice and rises through terrestrial, celestial and supercelestial natures, Adam's last movement is withdrawal into himself, and his final goal is mystical extinction in the godhead."

16 Among the Church Fathers, Origen and Jerome spoke of the "threefold" sense of Scripture, but the third of Origen's senses, the spiritual, was split into two, the allegorical and the anagogical, and so the "fourfold" sense became established. The mnemonic distich "Litera, gesta docet; quid credas, allegoria; moralis, quid agas; quo tendas anagogia" ("The letter teaches events, allegory what you should believe, morality teaches what you should do, anagogy what mark you should be aiming for") is most often cited from the *Glossa ordinaria* (De Lubac 1998, 1:1). An alternative version is: "Litera, scripta docet; quod credas, allegoria; quod speres,

anagoge; quid agas, tropologia.” On Origen, see De Lubac (1998, 1:142–59, 161–84 and passim).

17 Pico (1971, 1:178). Compare Antonino Raspanti’s introduction to Pico’s *Expositiones in Psalmos* (in Pico 1997, 18–21) and Wirszubski (1989, 262–63) on the sources of “the Hebrew terms of the fourfold interpretation of the Scripture which Pico uses in his *Apology*.” See also Campanini (2005, 432–44).

18 Cf. Farmer (1998, 345); Copenhaver (2002a). Cf. also *Conclusions on the Ways of Interpreting Orpheus’ Hymns According to Magic* 15 (Farmer 1998, 510).

19 *Sonetti* (1994, 33, 61): “di *caligine* opaca dianci pieno” (“full of impenetrable darkness”) (16.4) and “di *caligine* operto è ’l vivo raggio,” which could be translated as “the vivid ray piercing [through] darkness” (30.6). Interestingly, *caligine* (“darkness”) is a hapax in Dante (*Purg*. 11.30).

20 Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* 1.1100b5ff. (Aristotle 2002, 106): “For clearly if we were to track a person’s fortunes, we shall find ourselves often calling the same person happy and then miserable, thus revealing the happy man as a kind of *chameleon and infirmly based*” (emphasis added). Bausi correctly points out that the Aristotelian meaning of the term comes back, in a different context, in Pico’s (2003, 14) confutations of astrology in *Disputationes adversos astrologiam* (6.2). One could perhaps recognize here a nod to the great Renaissance theme and iconography of Fortune as chance, opportunity, *occasio temporis*, to be seized by the forelock. Copenhaver (2002a, 60) points instead to the negative, naturalistic, and “magic” background of the image.

21 *Asclepius* 5–6. Cf. Hermes Trismegistus (1992, 69).

22 Farmer (1998, 514): “Frustra adit naturam et Protheum, qui Pana non attraxerit.”

23 Wind (1968, 196).

24 Copenhaver stresses the (Christian) cabalistic leitmotif of the *Oration* over other themes: “Human mutability, according to Pico, is a marvel, but is also unreliable. […] Man finds his dignity by emulating the angels” (Copenhaver 2002a, 60).

25 Wind (1968, 218). According to Wind, we are not far here from Nicholas of Cusa’s *docta ignorantia* (“learned ignorance”). De Lubac and (after him) Bausi also recall a passage of Cusa’s *On Conjectures* (*De conjecturis*), in which the main theme of this section of the *Oration*, man’s potential transformation into a human God or a God humanized (*humanus Deus atque Deus humanatus*), is also clearly expressed (De Lubac 1974, 200–1).

26 See Bausi (Pico 2003, 25).

27 See Idel (2005).

28 For an interpretation of the role of Metatron in Pico’s angelology, see Copenhaver (2002a, 78ff.).

29 Ernst Cassirer (1942, 138) put Pico’s doctrine of God, man, and the world under the category of “symbolic thought.” Bori (2000, 86) agrees.

30 Cf. Copenhaver (2002a, 81): “[W]ritten in Latin, expressed in recondite allusions to classical and biblical texts, and dependent on sources even more arcane, the *Oration* could be read as the antithesis of what Descartes wanted philosophy to become: divorced from history and philology and obligated to clarity as an ideal.”

31 Cf. Ovid, *Metamorphoses* 15.165–72: “All things are changing; nothing dies. The spirit wanders, comes now here, now there, and occupies whatever frame it pleases. From beasts it passes into human bodies, and

from our bodies into beasts, but never perishes. And, as the pliant wax is stamped with new designs, does not remain as it was before nor keep the same form long, but is still the selfsame wax, so do I teach that the soul is ever the same, though it passes into ever-changing bodies” (Ovid, 1946).

32 In another section of the text (§37), we read in the Palatino manuscript: “[I]t is not the circular body that makes the *demon* [the “heavens” in the *princeps*] but straightforward reason.”

33 Augustine, *On Genesis against the Manichees* 2.23: “Hence, we read, and we hear, and we should believe, that the fullness of knowledge and the flaming sword [of the cherubim] guard the tree of life. No one can come to the tree of life except by these two ways, that is, by the endurance of troubles and the fullness of knowledge […], that is, by charity” (Augustine of Hippo 1990). The endurance of troubles, we may assume, is addressed in §§92–93 of the *Oration*. See also Farmer (1998, 41).

34 Philo, *Life of Moses* 2.97. See Augustine’s sermon on Psalms 17 (especially v. 10) and 98, Jerome’s *De interpretatione nominum hebraicorum* s.v., Peter Lombard’s commentary on Psalm 98, and Rabanus Maurus, *De universo* 5.3.

35 Cf. Augustine’s sermon on Psalm 79: “The cherub is the seat of God’s glory and is interpreted as the fullness of knowledge. There God sits in the fullness of knowledge. Though we understand that the cherubim are the exalted powers and virtues of the heavens, you will nevertheless be a cherub if you so desire. If the cherub is the seat of knowledge, listen to what the Scripture says: ‘the soul of the just man is the seat of knowledge’ (Wisdom 7). How, you say, will I become the seat of knowledge? Who will make it so? You yourself have the means to make it so: ‘the fullness of law is love’” (Rom. 13:10) (Augustine of Hippo 1888).

36 Cf. Pico’s first exposition on Psalm 17:12 (Pico 1997, 149) and the “solitary darkness of the Father” in §30.

37 In the Old Testament (Jer. 10:2), the upper waters are compared to the Jews (*Hep*. 7.2), whereas the lower waters come to represent the gentiles (*Hep*. 7.2) and more generally the earthly world from which Christians are freed, as if from a yoke (*Hep*. 7.3). Furthermore, Pico attributes to Moses the notion that the firmament (i.e., the sphere of the fixed stars) was placed by God between the two waters (*Hep*. 2.3).

38 See also Ps. 28:3.

39 Cf. John 4:13–15.

40 The inherent link between love (charity) and law, while not immediately apparent, becomes clear in Augustine's sermon on Psalm 98, in which he equates knowledge with the knowledge of God's law ("the duties of action," §69). Thus, Augustine's appeal to the reader to embody the fullness of knowledge is, not unlike what Pico presents here, an exhortation to aspire to the heights of theology.

41 See *Conclusiones* 2.5.14 and 2.11.10; Wirszubski (1989, 198–200); Farmer (1998, 441, 524–25). This same concept is found in Maimonides' *Guide of the Perplexed* 3.ex.

42 The most significant illustration of the motif is to be found in Richard of St. Victor's treatise *De arca mystica*, in which the complex elaboration of the contemplative process culminates within the tabernacle in the figures of the cherubim (see 4.5 and passim). See §232 of the *Oration*, which seems to echo Richard's main idea.

43 See the first proem to the *Heptaplus*.

44 It is worth noting that Pico's library contained a copy of what appears to be Berengar of Poitiers's defence of Abelard (Kibre 1936, 149, no. 207).

45 See *Conclusiones* 7.2–4. This is but a single example among many of the fact that Pico was pursuing, with well-intentioned yet perhaps naive optimism, certain fundamental notions with perilous disregard for what one may nowadays see as their “cultural baggage.” Another analogous example is to be found in the case of Abelard, who unhesitatingly explained that the Platonic *anima mundi* (“world soul”) was tantamount to the Holy Spirit (e.g., *Theologia Christiana* 1.5, *PL* 178.1144a–46d).

46 For example, *Theologia Platonica* 1.5.14, 13.2.10, and 14.2.8–10, among many other possibilities.

47 See Farmer (1998, 81–82, 549).

48 Augustine, for instance, had explained in his sermon on Psalm 98 that once the believer has gratefully accepted God’s illuminating grace, his feet become nimble like the hooves of a stag and his hands take on the strength of a bow (Ps. 17:34–35, 37). The stag’s hooves, then, come to represent the believer’s agile zeal, and his strong hands suggest his steadfastness in doing good works. See Augustine’s sermon on Ps. 9:15–16. Note, however, that the foot can also be a positive symbol: love directed to the proper ends (see Peter Lombard’s commentary on the same verses in Ps. 9 and *Sent*. 2.38; Bernard of Clairvaux’s sermon 13 on the Psalms).

49 E.g., *Conclusiones* 2.8.1.

50 Pertinent to this discussion is Di Napoli (1965, 410–16).

51 Daniélou has traced out the tradition of angels serving as the soul-bride’s helpers (Daniélou 1976, 83–94); cf. Augustine’s *De doctrina christiana* 1.37.

52 Cf. Philo’s *Life of Moses* 2.66–140; Clement of Alexandria’s *Stromateis* 5.6; Bede’s *De tabernaculo*.

53 Each of these translations comes from Rabin's edition (Maimonides 1995).

54 See also Pico's *Commento* 2.9.

55 The richest and most reliable annotation for the *Oration* is presently that of Francesco Bausi (Pico 2003).

56 Bausi strongly disagrees with this point of view, stressing how Pico's "opening to all philosophical-theological schools and religious traditions does not deny (and in fact preventively implies) that only one, the Christian, is the repository of a full and unique truth, communicated to man through Revelation" (Pico 2003, 26).

57 Cf. Vickers, Rombach, and Enenkel.

58 Cf. Bori (2000, 154–58).

59 Cf. Bausi (Pico 2003, 141–56).

60 It is not coincidental that (as Pico elaborates in his cabalistic *Conclusions*) Joshua Nave, the first in this lineage, has the same name as the Savior (Yehoshua's root = salvation), who, according to his followers, will fulfil the prophecy of the Old Testament.

61 Bori (2000, 90–94). Farmer (1998, 89–96, passim) adopts the category of syncretism, and Grafton (1997, 97) speaks instead of "a model of eclectic philosophy that would inspire imitation for centuries to come." An interpretation different from that of Bori is provided also by Bausi (Pico 2003, xlvii ff.), who stresses the fundamental continuity between Pico's *Oration* and his later writings, in particular the *Heptaplus*, part of a projected monumental tract *Against the Enemies of the Church* (*Adversus hostes ecclesiae*), of which only one part was drafted, the *Disputations against Divinatory Astrology*. In the proem to the third exposition of the

Heptaplus, Pico adopts an argument first put forth by Augustine in *De doctrina Christiana* (2.40), according to which Christians are the legitimate proprietors of those truths that pagan philosophers, in particular the Platonists, illegitimately claimed to possess.

62 Copenhaver (2002a, 75).

63 Copenhaver (2002a, 76). Pointing out that Pico sees in the Cabala both a *theosophy* (contemplative) and a *theurgy* (operative – a major influence on Pico's Cabala was the thirteenth-century mystic Abraham Abulafia, whose Cabala "was aggressively theurgic"), Copenhaver sees the possibility "that Pico meant to bring both the *Sefirot* (a theology expressed in names and hence lower than the "ineffable" theology) and the *Merkabah* (forms, angels, intelligences, what Maimonides called "metaphysics") into his practical Cabala." See also Wirszubski (1989, 137ff.).

64 Pesce (2004, introduction).

65 Cf. Pico's *Commento* (in the commentary to the final stanza), in which the Cabala is defined as "reception" precisely because it is transmitted not in writing but by word of mouth.

66 See, for example, Garin (1996).

67 Pico underlines how recently translations of Jewish cabalistic works into Latin had appeared, beginning with the humanists (§§251–53). Interestingly enough, the first printed editions of cabalistic works in Latin were not translations of Jewish works but Christian writings on the Cabala, such as Reuchlin's *De arte cabalistica* and *De verbo mirifico*.

68 See Copenhaver (2002a, 75ff.) for a recent attempt at situating these words within the cabalist tradition probably known to Pico, from Maimonides to Abulafia.

69 Cf. Bausi (Pico 2003, 131n257). In addition to the episode of Dactylus Hebreus, recounted by Pico himself, we discover in a letter of Lorenzo de' Medici to Giovanni Lanfredini (11 August 1488) that Pico had converted (using "his own arms") a young and learned Jew whom he had employed to translate some of his Hebrew books.

70 Cf. Bori (2000, 61): "It is evident that both points of view coexist in Pico: on the one hand, the persistence of the language of mysteries […]; on the other, Augustine and traditional biblical devotion." Indeed, Beroaldo called Pico "the Other Apuleius," referring to Apuleius as a follower of the sacred mysteries (Bausi 1996, 169).

Part II Text

lATIN TEXT

1. Legi, patres colendissimi, in Arabum monumentis, interrogatum Abdalam Sarracenum quid in hac quasi mundana scena admirandum maxime spectaretur, nihil spectari homine admirabilius respondisse.

2. Cui sententiae illud Mercurii adstipulatur: “Magnum, o Asclepi, miraculum est homo.”

TRANSLATION

1. Most esteemed fathers,[1] I have read in the ancient texts of the Arabians[2] that when Abdallah the Saracen[3] was questioned as to what on this world’s stage, so to speak, seemed to him most worthy of wonder, he replied that there is nothing to be seen more wonderful than man.[4]

2. This opinion is seconded by Mercury’s saying: “A great miracle, Asclepius, is man.”[5]

3. Horum dictorum rationem cogitanti mihi non satis illa faciebant, quae multa de humanae naturae praestantia afferuntur a multis: esse hominem creaturarum internuntium, superis familiarem, regem inferiorum; sensuum perspicacia, rationis indagine, intelligentiae lumine naturae interpretem; stabilis evi et fluxi temporis interstitium, et (quod Persae dicunt) mundi copulam, immo hymeneum, ab angelis, teste Davide, paulo deminutum.

4. Magna haec quidem, sed non principalia, idest quae summae admirationis privilegium sibi iure vendicent.

5. Cur enim non ipsos angelos et beatissimos caeli choros magis admiremur?

3. Still, when I considered the reasons behind these maxims,[6] I was unsatisfied by the arguments put forward by many men to explain the excellence of human nature:[7] that man is the intermediary between creatures, a companion of the higher beings, a king of the things beneath him; that, by the acuity of his senses, by the discernment of his reason and by the light of his intelligence he was the interpreter of nature;[8] that man is the midpoint between fixed eternity and fleeting time, the bond (as the Persians say[9]) or rather the wedding-song of the world,[10] and only slightly inferior, as David affirms,[11] to the angels.

4. These reasons are indeed great, but they are nonetheless not the principal ones. That is, they are not the main grounds on which man may rightfully claim for himself the privilege of the highest admiration.

5. Indeed, why then would we not find the angels themselves and the blessed choirs of heaven even more admirable?

6. Tandem intellexisse mihi sum visus cur felicissimum proindeque dignum omni admiratione animal sit homo, et quae sit demum illa conditio quam in universi serie sortitus sit, non brutis modo, sed astris, sed ultramundanis mentibus invidiosam.

7. Res supra fidem et mira!

8. Quidni? Nam et propterea magnum miraculum et admirandum profecto animal iure homo et dicitur et existimatur.

9. Sed quae nam ea sit audite, patres, et benignis auribus pro vestra humanitate hanc mihi operam condonate.

10. Iam summus Pater architectus Deus hanc quam videmus mundanam domum, divinitatis templum augustissimum, archanae legibus sapientiae fabrefecerat.

11. Supercelestem regionem mentibus decorarat; ethereos globos aeternis animis vegetarat; excrementarias ac faeculentas has inferioris mundi partes omnigena animalium turba complerat.

12. Sed, opere consumato, desiderabat artifex esse aliquem qui tanti operis rationem perpenderet, pulchritudinem amaret, magnitudinem admiraretur.

13. Idcirco iam rebus omnibus (ut Moses Timeusque testantur) absolutis, de producendo homine postremo cogitavit.

6. At length, it seemed to me that I had come to understand why man is the most fortunate of beings and therefore worthy of all admiration, and what finally is the condition that befell him in the universal order, a condition to be envied not only by beasts but even by the stars and the intelligences dwelling beyond this world.[12]

7. A thing surpassing belief, and wondrous too!

8. And why not? Since, for this very reason, man is rightly called, and thought to be, a great miracle and a being worthy of all admiration.

9. But hear, fathers, exactly what this condition is and, while you listen benevolently, kindly indulge me in my endeavour.

10. In accordance with the laws of His mysterious wisdom, God the supreme Father and Architect had already fashioned this worldly home we behold, this most sacred temple of His divinity.

11. He had already adorned the supercelestial region with intelligences, enlivened the heavenly globes with eternal souls, and filled the excremental and filthy parts of the lower world with a multitude of forms of animal life.

12. But when the work was finished, the Craftsman[13] still longed for there to be someone to ponder the meaning of such a magnificent achievement, to love its beauty and to marvel at its vastness.[14]

13. So, when everything was done (as Moses and Timaeus testify), He finally thought to bring forth man.[15]

14. Verum nec erat in archetipis unde novam sobolem effingeret, nec in thesauris quod novo filio hereditarium largiretur, nec in subsellis totius orbis ubi universi contemplator iste sederet.

15. Iam plena omnia; omnia summis, mediis infimisque ordinibus fuerant distributa.

16. Sed non erat paternae potestatis in extrema faetura quasi effetam defecisse; non erat Sapientiae consilii inopia in re necessaria fluctuasse; non erat benefici Amoris ut qui in aliis esset divinam liberalitatem laudaturus, in se illam damnare cogeretur.

17. Statuit tandem optimus opifex ut cui dari nihil proprium poterat, ei commune esset quicquid privatum singulis fuerat.

14. But there was nothing among His archetypes from which He could mould a new progeny, nor was there anything in his storehouses that He might bestow upon His new son as an inheritance, nor was there among the seats of the world any place for this contemplator of the universe.

15. Every place was by then filled; all things had already been assigned to the highest, the middle, and the lowest orders.

16. But it was not in the nature of the Father’s power to fail, as if exhausted, in His final creation. It was not in the nature of His wisdom to hesitate, as if at a loss, when faced with a necessary task. Nor was it in the nature of His beneficent love to have one who would praise divine generosity in all other things be forced to find it blameworthy in regard to himself.

17. At length, the Master Creator decreed that the creature to whom He had been unable to give anything wholly his own should share in common whatever belonged to every other being.[16]

18. Igitur hominem accepit, indiscretae opus imaginis, atque in mundi positum meditullio sic est alloquutus: “Nec certam sedem, nec propriam faciem, nec munus ullum peculiare tibi dedimus, o Adam, ut quam sedem, quam faciem, quae munera tute optaveris, ea pro voto, pro tua sententia, habeas et possideas.

19. Definita caeteris natura intra praescriptas a nobis leges cohercetur.

20. Tu, nullis angustiis cohercitus, pro tuo arbitrio, in cuius manu te posui, tibi illam prefinies.

21. Medium te mundi posui, ut circumspiceres inde comodius quicquid est in mundo.

22. Nec te celestem neque terrenum, neque mortalem neque immortalem fecimus, ut, tui ipsius quasi arbitrarius honorariusque plastes et fictor, in quam malueris tute formam effingas.

23. Poteris in inferiora, quae sunt bruta, degenerare; poteris in superiora, quae sunt divina, ex tui animi sententia regenerari.”

18. He therefore took man, this creature of indeterminate image,[17] set him in the middle of the world,[18] and said to him: “We have given you, Adam, no fixed seat or form of your own, no talent peculiar to you alone. This we have done so that whatever seat, whatever form, whatever talent you may judge desirable, these same may you have and possess according to your desire and judgment.

19. Once defined, the nature of all other beings is constrained within the laws We have prescribed for them.

20. But you, constrained by no limits, may determine your nature for yourself, according to your own free will, in whose hands We have placed you.

21. We have set you at the centre of the world so that from there you may more easily gaze upon whatever it contains.

22. We have made you neither of heaven nor of earth, neither mortal nor immortal,[19] so that you may, as the free and extraordinary[20] shaper of yourself, fashion yourself in whatever form you prefer.

23. It will be in your power to degenerate into the lower forms of life, which are brutish. Alternatively, you shall have the power, in accordance with the judgment of your soul, to be reborn into the higher orders, those that are divine.”

24. O summam Dei patris liberalitatem, summam et admirandam hominis foelicitatem, cui datum id habere quod optat, id esse quod velit!

25. Bruta, simul atque nascuntur, id secum afferunt (ut ait Lucilius) e bulga matris quod possessura sunt.

26. Supremi spiritus aut ab initio aut paulo mox id fuerunt, quod sunt futuri in perpetuas aeternitates.

24. O supreme liberality[21] of God the Father, and supreme and wonderful happiness[22] of man who is permitted to obtain what he desires and to be what he wills!

25. As soon as they are born, brutes bring with them from their mother's womb,[23] as Lucilius says, all that they are going to possess.

26. The Intelligences have been, either from the beginning or soon thereafter,[24] what they are perpetually going to be throughout eternity.

27. Nascenti homini omnifaria semina et omnigenae vitae germina indidit Pater.

28. Quae quisque excoluerit, illa adolescent, et fructus suos ferent in illo.

29. Si vegetalia, planta fiet; si sensualia, obrutescet; si rationalia, caeleste evadet animal; si intellectualia, angelus erit et Dei filius.

30. Et si, nulla creaturarum sorte contentus, in unitatis centrum suae se receperit, unus cum Deo spiritus factus, in solitaria Patris caligine, qui est super omnia constitutus omnibus antestabit.

27. The Father infused in man, at his birth, every sort of seed and all sprouts of every kind of life.[25]

28. These seeds will grow and bear fruit in each man who sows them.

29. If he cultivates his vegetative seeds, he will become a plant. If he cultivates his sensitive seeds, he will become a brute animal. If he cultivates

his rational seeds, he will become a heavenly being. If he cultivates his intellectual seeds, he will be an angel and a son of God.[26]

30. And if he – being dissatisfied with the lot assigned to any other creature – gathers himself into the centre of his own unity, thus becoming a single spirit with God in the solitary darkness[27] of the Father, he, who had been placed above all things, will become superior to all things.

31. Quis hunc nostrum chamaeleonta non admiretur?

32. Aut omnino quis aliud quicquam admiretur magis?

31. Who will not wonder at this chameleon of ours?[28]

32. Or rather, who will admire any other being more?

33. Quem non immerito Asclepius Atheniensis, versipellis huius et se ipsam transformantis naturae argumento, per Protheum in mysteriis significari dixit.

34. Hinc illae apud Hebreos et Pythagoricos methamorphoses celebratae.

33. Not without reason, Asclepius the Athenian[29] said that man was represented in the secret rites by Proteus because of his changing and metamorphous nature.[30]

34. Hence the metamorphoses renowned among the Jews[31] and the Pythagoreans.[32]

35. Nam et Hebreorum theologia secretior nunc Enoch sanctum in angelum divinitatis, quem vocant מטטרון, nunc in alia alios numina

reformant; et Pythagorici scelestos homines et in bruta deformant et, si Empedocli creditur, etiam in plantas.

35. Indeed, even the most secret Hebrew theology at one time transforms holy Enoch into an angel of divinity,[33] whom they call [מטטרון] *Metatron*,[34] and at other times it reshapes other men into other spirits. According to Pythagoreans, wicked men are deformed into brutes and, if Empedocles is to be believed, into plants as well.[35]

36. Quos imitatus Maumeth illud frequens habebat in ore, qui a divina lege recesserit brutum evadere.

37. Et merito quidem: neque enim plantam cortex, sed stupida et nihil sentiens natura; neque iumenta corium, sed bruta anima et sensualis; nec caelum orbiculatum corpus, sed recta ratio; nec sequestratio corporis, sed spiritalis intelligentia angelum facit.

38. Si quem enim videris deditum ventri, humi serpentem hominem, frutex est, non homo, quem vides; si quem in phantasiae quasi Calipsus vanis praestigiis cecutientem et, subscalpenti delinitum illecebra, sensibus mancipatum, brutum est, non homo, quem vides.

36. Imitating them, Mohammed frequently remarked that he who strays from divine law becomes a brute.[36]

37. And, indeed, rightly so. It is not in fact the bark that makes the plant, but dull and insentient nature; not the hide that makes a beast of burden, but a brutish and sensuous soul; not the circular body that makes the heavens, but straightforward reason; not the separation from the body that makes an angel, but its spiritual intelligence.[37]

38. If you see someone who is a slave to his belly, crawling along the ground,[38] it is not a man you see, but a plant; if you see someone who is enslaved by his own senses, blinded by the empty hallucinations brought on

by fantasy (as if by Calypso herself[39]) and entranced by their bedevilling spells, it is a brute animal you see, not a man.

39. Si recta philosophum ratione omnia discernentem, hunc venereris; caeleste est animal, non terrenum.

40. Si purum contemplatorem corporis nescium, in penetralia mentis relegatum, hic non terrenum, non caeleste animal: hic augustius est numen, humana carne circumvestitum.

41. Ecquis hominem non admiretur?

42. Qui non immerito in sacris Litteris Mosaycis et Christianis nunc “omnis carnis,” nunc “omnis creaturae” appellatione designatur, quando se ipsum ipse in omnis carnis faciem, in omnis creaturae ingenium effingit, fabricat et transformat.

43. Idcirco scribit Evantes Persa, ubi Chaldaicam theologiam enarrat, non esse homini suam ullam et nativam imaginem, extrarias multas et adventitias.

44. Hinc illud Chaldeorum [ו מטבצ משתנ ונדד ומחלפת גרמה כ ככ ברנש ה ח], idest “homo variae ac multiformis et desultoriae naturae animal.”

39. If you see a philosopher discerning things with right reason, worship him, for he is not an earthly creature, but divine.

40. If you see a pure contemplator, oblivious to his body and absorbed in the recesses of his mind, this is neither an earthly nor a heavenly creature: this is a still more eminent spirit, clothed in human flesh.[40]

41. Who, then, will not admire man?

42. Not undeservedly, in Mosaic and Christian Scripture he is sometimes called “all flesh” and sometimes “every creature,” insofar as he fashions, shapes, and transforms his own appearance into that of all flesh,[41] his own character into that of every creature.

43. Accordingly, Evanthes the Persian,[42] writing on Chaldean theology, says man possesses no innate image, but many that are extrinsic and acquired.

44. Hence that saying of the Chaldeans [תְּ ונדד ומחלפת גרמה כ כל ברנש הָ חיו מטבע מש];[43] that is, “Man is by nature diverse, multiform and inconstant.”[44]

45. Sed quorsum haec?

46. Ut intelligamus (postquam hac nati sumus conditione, ut id simus quod esse volumus) curare hoc potissimum debere nos, ut illud quidem in nos non dicatur, cum in honore essemus non cognovisse similes factos brutis et iumentis insipientibus, sed illud potius Asaph prophetae: “Dii estis et filii Excelsi omnes”; ne, abutentes indulgentissima Patris liberalitate, quam dedit ille liberam optionem e salutari noxiam faciamus nobis.

47. Invadat animum sacra quaedam et Iunonia ambitio, ut mediocribus non contenti anhelemus ad summa, adque illa (quando possumus, si volumus) consequenda totis viribus enitamur.

48. Dedignemur terrestria, caelestia contemnamus, et, quicquid mundi est denique posthabentes, ultramundanam curiam eminentissimae divinitati proximam advolemus.

49. Ibi, ut sacra tradunt mysteria, Seraphin, Cherubin et Throni primas possident; horum nos, iam cedere nescii et secundarum impatientes, et dignitatem et gloriam emulemur.

45. Yet, why go on about this?

46. So that we may understand that we (having been born into this condition; that is, born with the possibility to become what we wish to be) must take the greatest care, lest people say of us that we, although held in high esteem, did not realize that we had turned ourselves into brutes and mindless beasts of burden. Let us instead recall the saying of Asaph the prophet: “You are all gods and sons of the most high.”[45] Thus may we avoid abusing the most indulgent liberality of the Father by transforming the free choice He bestowed upon us from something beneficial to something harmful.

47. Let our souls be pervaded by a certain holy and Junonian ambition so that we, not satisfied with what is mediocre, may aspire to what is loftiest, and may apply ourselves with all our strength in that pursuit, for we shall succeed if we are so minded.

48. Let us spurn the terrestrial, disdain the celestial;[46] disregarding all that is of this world, let us fly off to the otherworldly court that is near to the most eminent Divinity.[47]

49. There, according to the sacred mysteries, seraphim, cherubim, and thrones occupy the first places;[48] let us emulate their dignity[49] and glory, unwilling as we are to yield to them and unable to endure second place.

50. Erimus illis, cum voluerimus, nihilo inferiores.

51. Sed qua ratione, aut quid tandem agentes?

52. Videamus quid illi agant, quam vivant vitam.

53. Eam si et nos vixerimus (possumus enim), illorum sortem iam equaverimus.

54. Ardet Saraph charitatis igne; fulget Cherub intelligentiae splendore; stat Thronus iudicii firmitate.

55. Igitur si actuosae addicti vitae inferiorum curam recto examine susceperimus, Thronorum stata soliditate firmabimur.

56. Si ab actionibus feriati in opificio opificem, in opifice opificium meditantes, in contemplandi ocio negociabimur, luce Cherubica undique corruscabimus.

57. Si charitate ipsum opificem solum ardebimus, illius igne, qui edax est, in Saraphicam effigiem repente flammabimur.

58. Super Throno, idest iusto iudice, sedet Deus iudex seculorum.

50. If so we wish, we will not be inferior to them at all.

51. But in what way, or by doing what?

52. Let us consider what they do, what life they lead.

53. If we too live that life (and indeed we can), we will be equal to their lot.

54. The seraph burns with the fire of love; the cherub shines with the splendour of intelligence; the throne stands in the steadfastness of judgment.

55. Therefore, if we, being dedicated to an active life, undertake the care of inferior things with proper consideration of their worth, we will be strengthened by the steadfast solidity of the thrones.[50]

56. If we, being unburdened by actions, meditate on the Creator in His creation and on creation in the Creator, we shall be engaged in the tranquillity of contemplation; we shall shine on all sides with cherubic light.[51]

57. If we burn for the Creator alone, with charity, with its all-consuming fire, we shall burst into flame in the likeness of the seraphim.[52]

58. Upon the throne, that is, upon the just judge, sits God, the Judge of all time.

59. Super Cherub, idest contemplatore, volat atque eum quasi incubando fovet.

60. Spiritus enim Domini fertur super aquas, has – inquam – quae super caelos sunt, quae apud Iob Dominum laudant antelucanis hymnis.

61. Qui Saraph, idest amator est, in Deo est, et Deus in eo, immo et Deus et ipse unum sunt.

62. Magna Thronorum potestas, quam iudicando, summa Saraphinorum sublimitas, quam amando assequimur.

63. Sed quo nam pacto vel iudicare quisquam vel amare potest incognita?

64. Amavit Moses Deum quem vidit, et administravit iudex in populo quae vidit prius contemplator in monte.

59. Over the cherub, that is, over the contemplator, He flies[53] and, as if brooding over him,[54] imbues him with warmth.

60. Indeed, the Spirit of the Lord is carried over the waters, the waters that, I say, are above the Heavens and that praise God in the pre-dawn hymns in the book of Job.[55]

61. He who is a seraph, that is, a lover, is in God and God is in him; indeed, he and God are one.[56]

62. Great is the power of the thrones that we may reach by judging; supreme is the height of the seraphim that we may reach by loving.

63. And yet in what manner can anyone either judge or love things unknown?[57]

64. Moses loved the Lord Whom he saw. As a judge, Moses administered to the people the things that he earlier saw on the mountain as a contemplator.[58]

65. Ergo medius Cherub sua luce et Saraphico igni nos praeparat, et ad Thronorum iudicium pariter illuminat.

66. Hic est nodus primarum mentium, ordo Palladicus philosophiae contemplativae preses; hic nobis et emulandus primo et ambiendus, atque adeo comprehendendus est, unde et ad amoris rapiamur fastigia, et ad munera actionum bene instructi paratique descendamus.

67. At vero operae precium, si ad exemplar vitae Cherubicae vita nostra formanda est, quae illa et qualis sit, quae actiones, quae illorum opera, prae oculis et in numerato habere.

68. Quod cum nobis per nos, qui caro sumus et quae humi sunt sapimus, consequi non liceat, adeamus antiquos patres, qui de his rebus utpote sibi domesticis et cognatis locuplectissimam nobis et certam fidem facere possunt.

69. Consulamus Paulum apostolum, vas electionis, quid ipse, cum ad tertium sublimatus est caelum, agentes Cherubinorum exercitus viderit.

70. Respondebit utique, Dyonisio interprete, purgari illos, tum illuminari, postremo perfici.

65. Hence, the cherub, located in the middle position, uses his light both to prepare us for the seraphic fire and likewise to illuminate for us the judgment of the thrones.[59]

66. The cherub is the bond of the Prime Minds, the order of Pallas, the overseer of contemplative philosophy.[60] First we must emulate him, thirst after him and to the same degree understand him in order that we may be raised from him to the heights of love and descend from him, well taught and prepared, to the duties of the active life.

67. And yet, if our life is to be modelled on the example of the cherub's, it is worth our while to have before our eyes an idea of what life they lead and what it is like,[61] what their duties are and what they do.

68. Inasmuch as we, who are flesh and have the smell of earthly things,[62] are not permitted to follow their model of our own accord, let us consult the ancient Fathers, for they, to whom these things were common and well known, can provide us with certain and abundant evidence of their nature.

69. Let us inquire of the apostle Paul, the chosen vessel,[63] regarding the activities of the cherubic hosts whom he saw when raised up to the third heaven.

70. He will certainly answer, according to the interpretation of Dionysius, that they are cleansed, then illuminated, and afterward are perfected.[64]

71. Ergo et nos, Cherubicam in terris vitam emulantes, per moralem scientiam affectuum impetus cohercentes, per dialecticam rationis caliginem discutientes, quasi ignorantiae et vitiorum eluentes sordes animam purgemus, ne aut affectus temere debacchentur, aut ratio imprudens quandoque deliret.

72. Tum bene compositam ac expiatam animam naturalis philosophiae lumine perfundamus, ut postremo divinarum rerum eam cognitione perficiamus.

73. Et ne nobis nostri sufficiant, consulamus Iacob patriarcham, cuius imago in sede gloriae sculpta corruscat.

74. Admonebit nos pater sapientissimus in inferno dormiens, mundo in superno vigilans; sed admonebit per figuram (ita eis omnia contingebant) esse scalas ab imo solo ad caeli summa protensas, multorum graduum serie distinctas, fastigio Dominum insidere, contemplatores angelos per eas vicibus alternantes ascendere et descendere.

71. So too, emulating the cherubic life on Earth, curbing the drive of the emotions through moral science, dispersing the darkness of reason through dialectics (as if washing away the squalor of ignorance and vice), may we purge our souls, lest our emotions run amok or our reason imprudently run off course at any time.[65]

72. Then may we imbue our purified and well-prepared soul with the light of natural philosophy so that afterward we may perfect it with the knowledge of things divine.[66]

73. And lest we be satisfied by those of our own, let us also consult Jacob the patriarch, whose image shines, chiselled in the dwelling place of glory.[67]

74. The most wise father, asleep in the lower world and awake in the higher, will illuminate us.[68] But he will teach us through a figure (in this way all things were known to them) that there is a ladder that stretches from the lowest earth to the highest Heavens and that is marked by a series of many rungs. God is at its height, and the contemplative angels move up and down it in turns.[69]

75. Quod si hoc idem nobis angelicam affectantibus vitam factitandum est, queso, quis Domini scalas vel sordidato pede, vel male mundis manibus attinget?

76. Impuro, ut habent mysteria, purum attingere nephas.

77. Sed qui hi pedes? Quae manus?

78. Profecto pes animae illa est portio despicatissima, qua ipsa materiae tanquam terrae solo innititur: altrix – inquam – potestas et cibaria, fomes libidinis et voluptariae mollitudinis magistra.

79. Manus animae cur irascentiam non dixerimus, quae appetentiae propugnatrix pro ea decertat, et sub pulvere ac sole predatrix rapit quae illa sub umbra dormitans helluetur?

75. Yet, if we are to carry out these things in our efforts to imitate the angelic life, who, I ask, will dare to touch the Ladder of God, either with unclean feet or with unwashed hands?

76. It is unlawful, as the mysteries have it, to touch the clean with the unclean.[70]

77. But what feet are these? What hands?

78. To be sure, the foot of the soul is that part which is most despicable, that which leans upon matter as if on earthly soil; it is the faculty, I say, that feeds and nourishes; it is, I say, the kindling wood of lust and the teacher of sensual weakness.[71]

79. And why not call the hands of the soul its irascible part, that which fights on behalf of Desire,[72] battles for it, and like a plunderer takes away in broad daylight and the public arena[73] the things that Desire, resting in the shade, then devours?[74]

80. Has manus, hos pedes, idest totam sensualem partem in qua sedet corporis illecebra quae animam obtorto (ut aiunt) detinet collo, ne a scalis tamquam prophani pollutique reiciamur, morali philosophia quasi vivo flumine abluamus.

81. At nec satis hoc erit, si per Iacob scalam discursantibus angelis comites esse volumus, nisi et a gradu in gradum rite promoveri, et a scalarum tramite deorbitare nusquam, et reciprocos obire excursus bene apti prius instructique fuerimus.

80. These hands, these feet, are the entire sensual part of the body in which resides the attraction that drags the soul back, as they say, *obtorto collo*.[75] Let us wash them in moral philosophy as in a flowing river lest we be held back from the ladder as wicked and unclean.[76]

81. And yet not even this will be enough if we wish to be companions of the angels who hasten up and down Jacob's ladder unless we are first well prepared and instructed to be promoted from step to step, to wheel away nowhere from the course of the ladder, and to face their movements to and fro.

82. Quod cum per artem sermocinalem sive rationariam erimus consequuti, iam Cherubico spiritu animati, per scalarum idest naturae gradus philosophantes, a centro ad centrum omnia pervadentes, nunc unum

quasi Osyrim in multitudinem vi Titanica discerpentes descendemus, nunc multitudinem quasi Osyridis membra in unum vi Phebea colligentes ascendemus, donec, in sinu Patris – qui super scalas est – tandem quiescentes, theologica foelicitate consumabimur.

83. Percontemur et iustum Iob, qui foedus iniit cum Deo vitae prius quam ipse ederetur in vitam, quid summus Deus in decem illis centenis millibus qui assistunt ei potissimum desideret: pacem utique respondebit, iuxta id quod apud eum legitur: “Qui facit pacem in excelsis.”

84. Et quoniam supremi ordinis monita medius ordo inferioribus interpretatur, interpretetur nobis Iob theologi verba Empedocles philosophus.

85. Hic duplicem naturam in nostris animis sitam, quarum altera sursum tollimur ad celestia, altera deorsum trudimur ad inferna, per litem et amicitiam, sive bellum et pacem, ut sua testantur carmina, nobis significat.

82. Once we, inspired by the cherubic spirit, have reached this point through the art of speaking or of reasoning – that is, philosophizing according to the grades of Nature, penetrating the whole from the centre to the centre[77] – then shall we descend, dashing the one into many with Titanic force like Osiris, and ascend, drawing together with Phoebean might the many into one, like Osiris’s limbs,[78] until at last, resting in the bosom of the Father Who is at the top of the ladder, we shall be made perfect in theological bliss.[79]

83. And let us inquire of just Job, who entered into a living pact with the God of life before he was brought into being,[80] as to what God the Highest desires among those tens of hundreds of thousands who are there present before Him.[81] He will certainly answer “Peace,” in accordance with what is written in the book of Job: “He who makes peace in the heavens.”[82]

84. And since the middle order interprets the precepts of the supreme order for the lower ones,[83] let now Empedocles the philosopher interpret for us the words of Job the theologian.

85. Empedocles, as his songs attest, presents to us through the symbols of strife and friendship, or of war and peace, the dual nature that is set in our souls: one of them lifts us upwards to the heavens and the other drags us down into the depths.[84]

86. In quibus se lite et discordia actum, furenti similem, profugum a diis in altum iactari conqueritur.

87. Multiplex profecto, patres, in nobis discordia; gravia et intestina domi habemus, et plus quam civilia bella.

88. Quae si noluerimus, si illam affectaverimus pacem quae in sublime ita nos tollat ut inter excelsos Domini statuamur, sola in nobis compescet prorsus et sedabit philosophia.

89. Moralis primum, si noster homo ab hostibus indutias tantum quesierit, multiplicis bruti effrenes excursiones et leonis iurgia, iras animosque contundet; tum si rectius consulentes nobis perpetuae pacis securitatem desideraverimus, aderit illa et vota nostra liberaliter implebit, quippe quae cesa utraque bestia, quasi icta porca, inviolabile inter carnem et spiritum foedus sanctissimae pacis sanciet.

90. Sedabit dialectica rationis turbas, inter orationum pugnantias et syllogismorum captiones anxie tumultuantis.

91. Sedabit naturalis philosophia opinionis lites et dissidia, quae inquietam hinc inde animam vexant, distrahunt et lacerant.

86. In these songs, he deplores being tossed upon the seas, driven by conflict and discord like a madman and banished from the gods.[85]

87. Manifold indeed, O fathers, is the discord in us; we have grave internal, more than civil, wars in our home.[86]

88. They are such that, if we desire them not, if we yearn after that peace which will lift us up and set us among God's most exalted ones, only philosophy will be able to still the troubles within us and bring us calm.

89. If our man[87] would just seek a truce from his enemies, moral philosophy will beat down the unbridled stampede of the manifold beast and the aggression, ire, and arrogance of the lion.[88] Then, if we yearn right-mindedly for the safety of perpetual peace for ourselves, it will come and liberally satisfy our desires; indeed, both beasts having been sacrificed like a stuck sow, it will ratify an everlasting pact of the most holy peace between the flesh and the spirit.[89]

90. Dialectics will calm the tumults of reason agitated and tossed about between the contradictions of speech and the captiousness of syllogisms.

91. Natural philosophy will allay the differences of opinion and disagreements that vex, perplex, and afflict our restless soul from all sides.

92. Sed ita sedabit, ut meminisse nos iubeat esse naturam, iuxta Heraclitum, ex bello genitam, ob id ab Homero "contentionem" vocitatam; idcirco in ea veram quietem et solidam pacem se nobis prestare non posse, esse hoc dominae suae, idest sanctissimae theologiae, munus et privilegium.

93. Ad illam ipsa et viam monstrabit et comes ducet, quae procul nos videns properantes "Venite," inclamabit, "ad me qui laboratis, venite et ego reficiam vos, venite ad me et dabo vobis pacem quam mundus et natura vobis dare non possunt."

94. Tam blande vocati, tam benigniter invitati, alatis pedibus, quasi terrestres Mercurii, in beatissimae amplexus matris evolantes, optata pace perfruemur: pace sanctissima, individua copula, unianimi amicitia, qua omnes animi in una mente, quae est super omnem mentem, non concordent adeo, sed ineffabili quodammodo unum penitus evadant.

92. But it will bring harmony in such a way as to remind us that nature is the offspring of war, as Heraclitus said, and is therefore called "strife" by Homer.[90] Thus, it is said that in philosophy true rest and stable peace cannot reveal themselves to us alone, that this is the duty and privilege of its mistress; that is, of the most holy Theology.[91]

93. She will show us the way to this peace and like a companion will lead us. Seeing us hurrying along from afar, she will call out, "Come to me, you who exert yourselves in vain; come and I will restore you; come to me and I will give you that peace which the world and nature cannot give to you."[92]

94. So gently called, so kindly invited, we will then fly away into the embrace of the most blessed Mother like terrestrial Mercuries with winged feet[93] and will rejoice in the longed-for peace.[94] This is that most holy peace, the indissoluble bond, the harmonious friendship in which all souls, in one mind (a mind that is above all minds) are not only in agreement but, indeed, in a certain ineffable way, inwardly become one.[95]

95. Haec est illa amicitia quam totius philosophiae finem esse Pythagorici dicunt; haec illa pax quam facit Deus in excelsis suis, quam angeli in terram descendentes annuntiarunt hominibus bonae voluntatis, ut per eam ipsi homines ascendentes in caelum angeli fierent.

96. Hanc pacem amicis, hanc nostro optemus seculo, optemus unicuique domui quam ingredimur, optemus animae nostrae, ut per eam ipsa Dei domus fiat; ut, postquam per moralem et dialecticam suas sordes excusserit, multiplici philosophia quasi aulico apparatu se exornarit, portarum fastigia

theologicis sertis coronarit, descendat Rex gloriae et cum Patre veniens mansionem faciat apud eam.

95. This is the friendship that the Pythagoreans call the end of all philosophy,[96] that peace which God makes in His heavens, which the angels who came down to earth announced to men of good will so that these men would, ascending to heaven, be transformed by it into angels.[97]

96. Let us desire this peace for our friends, for our times; let us desire it for whatever home we enter.[98] Let us desire it for our soul so that in her[99] may be made a house of the Lord, so that, after casting off her impurities through moral philosophy and dialectics, our soul may adorn herself with multifaceted philosophy, as if with royal magnificence, and so that she may crown the heights of her doors with the garlands of theology. And let us desire this peace for our soul so that the King of Glory[100] may descend at last, together with the Father, to make a home in her.[101]

97. Quo tanto hospite si se dignam praestiterit (qua est illius immensa clementia) deaurato vestitu quasi toga nuptiali, multiplici scientiarum circumdata varietate, speciosum hospitem, non ut hospitem iam, sed ut sponsum excipiet, a quo ne unquam dissolvatur dissolvi cupiet a populo suo, et domum patris sui, immo se ipsam oblita, in se ipsa cupiet mori ut vivat in sponso, in cuius conspectu preciosa profecto mors sanctorum eius: mors – inquam – illa, si dici mors debet plenitudo vitae, cuius meditationem esse studium philosophiae dixerunt sapientes.

97. If our soul shows herself to be worthy of such a Guest – for His Clemency is immense[102] – she (clad in gold, as in a wedding toga, and surrounded by a diverse variety of sciences[103]) will receive her handsome Guest not merely as a Guest but as a Bridegroom.[104] So as not to be separated from Him, she will wish to be separated from her people. Having forgotten her own father's home – indeed, having forgotten herself – she will wish to die in herself so that she may live in her Spouse, in Whose sight the death of His saints is truly precious.[105] This is the death, I say (if

one must call that plenitude of life death), whose contemplation is, according to the sages, the study of philosophy.[106]

98. Citemus et Mosen ipsum, a sacrosanctae et ineffabilis intelligentiae fontana plenitudine, unde angeli suo nectare inebriantur, paulo deminutum.

99. Audiemus venerandum iudicem nobis in deserta huius corporis solitudine habitantibus leges sic edicentem: “Qui polluti adhuc morali indigent, cum plebe habitent extra tabernaculum sub divo, quasi Thessali sacerdotes interim se expiantes.

98. Let us take as an example Moses, who is himself but a bit inferior to the fountain-like fullness of sacrosanct and ineffable intelligence whose nectar inebriates the angels.[107]

99. We will hear the venerable Judge thus declare His laws to us who live in the empty solitude of this body:[108] “Let those who are unclean and as yet in need of moral philosophy dwell with the masses outside the tabernacle in the open air while they purify themselves like the priests of Thessaly.[109]

100. Qui mores iam composuerunt, in sanctuarium recepti, nondum quidem sacra attractent, sed prius dialetico famulatu, seduli levitae philosophiae, sacris ministrent.

101. Tum ad ea et ipsi admissi, nunc superioris Dei regiae multicolorem, idest sydereum aulicum ornatum, nunc caeleste candelabrum septem luminibus distinctum, nunc pellicea elementa in philosophiae sacerdotio contemplentur, ut postremo, per theologicae sublimitatis merita in templi adyta recepti, nullo imaginis intercedente velo divinitatis gloria perfruantur.”

102. Haec nobis profecto Moses et imperat et imperando admonet, excitat, inhortatur, ut per philosophiam ad futuram caelestem gloriam, dum

possumus, iter paremus nobis.

100. Let those who have already put their behaviour in order and have been received into the sanctuary not yet lay hands upon the sacred things, but first, in the service of dialectics, let them serve the holy things of philosophy like diligent Levites.

101. Once they are allowed access to the holy things in the priesthood of philosophy, let them contemplate the multicoloured aspect of the higher kingdom of God; that is, the divine, princely decoration, as well as the celestial candelabra adorned with seven lights.[110] Let them behold the skins so that they, permitted at last into the recesses of the temple[111] through the merits of theological sublimity, may rejoice in the glory of the Divinity without any veil of a likeness coming in between."[112]

102. These things Moses truly commands of us and in commanding instructs, incites, and encourages so that through philosophy we may prepare for ourselves, while we are able, the path to the future celestial glory.[113]

103. Verum enimvero, nec Mosayca tantum aut Christiana mysteria, sed priscorum quoque theologia harum, de quibus disputaturus accessi, liberalium artium et emolumenta nobis et dignitatem ostendit.

104. Quid enim aliud sibi volunt in Graecorum archanis observati initiatorum gradus, quibus primo, hercle, per illas quas diximus quasi februales artes, moralem et dialecticam, purificatis, contingebat mysteriorum susceptio?

105. Quae quid aliud esse potest quam secretioris per philosophiam naturae interpretatio?

103. In fact, however, not only the Mosaic and Christian mysteries[114] but also the theology of the ancients[115] shows us the dignity and value of the

liberal arts, which I came to discuss.

104. For at what else, by Hercules![116] was the observance of the different degrees of initiation in Greek mysteries aimed? Only after having been purified through moral philosophy and dialectics,[117] those arts that we might call expiatory, could the initiates gain entrance to the mysteries.[118]

105. And what else can such an initiation possibly signify if not an understanding, achieved through philosophy, of nature's most mysterious things?

106. Tum demum ita dispositis illa adveniebat ἐποπτεία, idest rerum divinarum per theologiae lumen inspectio.

107. Quis talibus sacris initiari non appetat?

108. Quis, humana omnia posthabens, fortunae contemnens bona, corporis negligens, deorum conviva adhuc degens in terris fieri non cupiat, et aeternitatis nectare madidus mortale animal immortalitatis munere donari?

109. Quis non Socraticis illis furoribus, a Platone in *Phaedro* decantatis, sic afflari non velit ut alarum pedumque remigio hinc, idest ex mundo, qui est positus in maligno, propere aufugiens, ad caelestem Hierusalem concitatissimo cursu feratur?

110. Agamur, patres, agamur Socraticis furoribus, qui extra mentem ita nos ponant, ut mentem nostram et nos ponant in Deo!

106. Only then did that ἐποπτεία,[119] the intimate vision of divine things by the light of theology, come to those who were so disposed.

107. Who would not yearn to be initiated into such sacred rites?

108. Who, leaving behind all human concerns, scorning the goods of fortune and pleasures of the body, would not wish to become a guest at the table of the gods while still alive on earth[120] and, inebriated by the nectar of eternity, to receive, though still a mortal creature, the gift of immortality?[121]

109. Who would not wish to be so inspired by those Socratic frenzies, which Plato celebrates in the *Phaedrus*,[122] that he is whisked away to the heavenly Jerusalem, soaring from here – that is, from this world set on evil[123] – with oarlike strokes of wings and feet?[124]

110. Let us be led away, fathers, let us be led away by the Socratic frenzies that will so lift us beyond our minds[125] as to put our mind and ourselves in God!

111. Agemur ab illis utique, si quid est in nobis ipsi prius egerimus; nam si et per moralem affectuum vires ita per debitas competentias ad modulos fuerint intentae, ut immota invicem consonent concinentia, et per dialecticam ratio ad numerum se progrediendo moverit, Musarum perciti furore celestem armoniam intimis auribus combibemus.

112. Tum Musarum dux Bacchus, in suis mysteriis (idest visibilibus naturae signis) invisibilia Dei philosophantibus nobis ostendens, inebriabit nos ab ubertate domus Dei, in qua tota si uti Moses erimus fideles, accedens sacratissima theologia duplici furore nos animabit.

111. They will surely lead us away – but only once we ourselves have taken control of what is ours. If, through moral philosophy, the forces of our passions have been guided correctly toward their proper ends (in such a way that they produce together a lasting harmony[126]) and if, through dialectics, our reason has moved along at the proper pace, only then, stirred by the frenzy of the Muses,[127] shall we drink in that heavenly harmony with our inmost hearing.

112. Then, through his mysteries[128] (that is, through the visible signs of nature), Bacchus, the leader of the Muses,[129] will show the invisible things of God[130] to those of us who pursue philosophy and will make us drunk with the abundance of God's house;[131] and if we, like Moses, prove faithful in all God's house,[132] most sacred Theology shall draw close to us, animating us with a twofold frenzy.

113. Nam in illius eminentissimam sublimati speculam, inde et quae sunt, quae erunt quaeque fuerint insectili metientes aevo, et primaevam pulchritudinem suspicientes, illorum Phebei vates, huius alati erimus amatores, et ineffabili demum charitate quasi aestro perciti, quasi Saraphini ardentes extra nos positi, numine pleni, iam non ipsi nos, sed ille erimus ipse qui fecit nos.

114. Sacra Apollinis nomina, si quis eorum significantias et latitantia perscrutetur mysteria, satis ostendent esse deum illum non minus philosophum quam vatem.

115. Quod cum Ammonius satis sit exequutus, non est cur ego nunc aliter pertractem; sed subeant animum, patres, tria Delphica precepta oppido his necessaria, qui non ficti, sed veri Apollinis, qui illuminat omnem animam venientem in hunc mundum, sacrosanctum et augustissimum templum introgressuri sunt: videbitis nihil aliud illa nos admonere, quam ut tripartitam hanc, de qua est presens disputatio, philosophiam totis viribus amplectamur.

113. For, raised to her most eminent heights, and thence comparing to indivisible eternity all things that are and shall be and have been, we shall be the Phoebean seers of those things;[133] and, admiring that primeval beauty, we shall become its winged lovers.[134] And at last, roused by ineffable love as if by a frenzy,[135] and borne outside ourselves like ardent seraphim, filled with the godhead,[136] we shall no longer be ourselves, but He Himself Who made us.[137]

114. The sacred names of Apollo, if anyone investigates their meanings and hidden mysteries, sufficiently show that God is, no less than a seer, a philosopher.[138]

115. But since Ammonius[139] has amply examined this matter, there is no reason for me to treat it further. Instead, fathers, let us call to mind the three Delphic precepts,[140] which are absolutely necessary to those who are to enter the most holy and august temple, not of the false but of the true Apollo, who illuminates every soul that comes into this world;[141] you will realize that they exhort us to do nothing other than embrace with all our strength the tripartite philosophy that we now discuss.

116. Illud enim μηδὲν ἄγαν, idest "nequid nimis," virtutum omnium normam et regulam per mediocratits rationem, de qua moralis agit, recte praescribit.

117. Tum illud γνῶθι σεαυτόν, idest "cognosce te ipsum," ad totius naturae nos cognitionem, cuius et interstitium et quasi cynnus natura est hominis, excitat et inhortatur.

118. Qui enim se cognoscit, in se omnia cognoscit, ut Zoroaster prius, deinde Plato in *Alcibiade* scripserunt.

119. Postremo, hac cognitione per naturalem philosophiam illuminati, iam Deo proximi, εἶ, idest "es" dicentes, theologica salutatione verum Apollinem familiariter proindeque foeliciter appellabimus.

120. Consulamus et Pythagoram sapientissimum, ob id praecipue sapientem, quod sapientis se dignum nomine nunquam existimavit.

121. Praecipiet primo ne super modium sedeamus, idest rationalem partem qua anima omnia metitur, iudicat et examinat, ociosa desidia ne

remittentes amittamus, sed dialectica exercitatione ac regula et dirigamus assidue et excitemus.

122. Tum cavenda in primis duo nobis significabit, ne aut adversus solem emingamus, aut inter sacrificandum ungues resecemus.

116. For the famous maxim μηδὲν ἄγαν (that is, “nothing too much”)[142] rightly prescribes as rule and norm for every virtue the criterion of the “mean,” of which moral philosophy speaks.

117. Then the maxim γνῶθι σεαυτόν (that is, “know thyself”)[143] urges and exhorts us to the knowledge of all nature, of which the nature of man is the intermediary and, so to speak, the mixture.[144]

118. For he who knows himself in himself knows all things, as was first written by Zoroaster and later by Plato in the *Alcibiades*.[145]

119. Finally, once natural philosophy has enlightened us with this knowledge, we, being very close to God and saying εἶ (that is, “you are”),[146] shall address by a theological salutation the true Apollo on intimate and likewise blissful terms.

120. But let us also consult the exceedingly wise Pythagoras,[147] wise precisely because he never deemed himself worthy of that name.[148]

121. He will first advise us “not to sit on a bushel”[149] – that is, not to lose that rational faculty through which the soul measures, judges, and considers all things – by abandoning it to sloth and inaction; rather, he will advise us by the exercise and the rule of dialectics to direct and to stimulate that faculty assiduously.

122. Then he will point out to us two things to be avoided above all: that is, making water facing the sun and trimming our nails while offering

sacrifice.[150]

123. Sed postquam per moralem et superfluentium voluptatum fluxas eminxerimus appetentias, et unguium presegmina quasi acutas irae prominentias et animorum aculeos resecuerimus, tum demum sacris, idest de quibus mentionem fecimus Bacchi mysteriis, interesse, et, cuius pater ac dux merito Sol dicitur, nostrae contemplationi vacare incipiamus.

124. Postremo ut gallum nutriamus nos admonebit, idest ut divinam animae nostrae partem divinarum rerum cognitione quasi solido cibo et caelesti ambrosia pascamus.

125. Hic est gallus cuius aspectum leo, idest omnis terrena potestas, formidat et reveretur.

126. Hic ille gallus cui datam esse intelligentiam apud Iob legimus.

127. Hoc gallo canente aberrans homo resipiscit.

123. But after we have urinated away the dissolute appetites of our overflowing pleasures through moral philosophy and pared away, like nail clippings, the sharp points of wrath and the spines of animosity,[151] only then shall we finally begin to take part in the sacred rites, that is, in the abovementioned mysteries of Bacchus, and to dedicate ourselves to that contemplation of which the sun is rightly called the father and guide.[152]

124. Finally Pythagoras will exhort us “to feed the cock”[153] – that is, to nourish the divine part of our soul[154] – with the knowledge of divine things, as if with solid food and heavenly ambrosia.[155]

125. This is the cock whose sight fills the lion – that is, all earthly power – with fear and awe.[156]

126. This is the cock to whom, as we read in Job, intelligence was given.[157]

127. When this cock crows, the erring man comes to his senses.[158]

128. Hic gallus in matutino crepusculo, matutinis astris Deum laudantibus, quotidie commodulatur.

129. Hunc gallum moriens Socrates, cum divinitatem animi sui divinitati maioris mundi copulaturum se speraret, Esculapio, idest animarum medico, iam extra omne morbi discrimen positus, debere se dixit.

130. Recenseamus et Chaldeorum monumenta: videbimus (si illis creditur) per easdem artes patere viam mortalibus ad felicitatem.

128. In the dawn twilight, this cock sings each day with the morning stars in praise of God.[159]

129. This is the cock that the dying Socrates, when – now out of danger of all bodily illness – he was hoping to join the divine part of his soul to the divinity of the greater world,[160] said he owed to Aesculapius; that is, to the physician of souls.[161]

130. But let us also review the writings of the Chaldeans,[162] and we shall see (if they are trustworthy) that it is by these same arts that the road to happiness is made accessible to mortals.

131. Scribunt interpretes Chaldei verbum fuisse Zoroastris alatam esse animam, cumque alae exciderent ferri illam praeceps in corpus, tum illis subcrescentibus ad superos revolare.

132. Percunctantibus eum discipulis quo pacto alis bene plumantibus volucres animos sortirentur: “Irrigetis – dixit – alas aquis vitae.”

133. Iterum sciscitantibus unde has aquas peterent, sic per parabolam (qui erat hominis mos) illis respondit: “Quatuor amnibus paradisus Dei abluitur et irrigatur; indidem vobis salutares aquas hauriatis.

134. Nomen ei qui ab aquilone […], quod ‘rectum’ denotat; ei qui ab occasu […], quod ‘expiationem’ significat; ei qui ab ortu […], quod ‘lumen’ sonat; ei qui a meridie […], quod nos ‘pietatem’ interpretari possumus.”

131. The Chaldean interpreters write that it was a saying of Zoroaster’s that the soul is winged and, when its wings fall off, it plummets into the body;[163] but once the wings have regrown, it flies back to heaven.[164]

132. When his disciples asked him how they too might obtain souls with well-plumed wings and the ability to fly, he replied: “Soak them well in the waters of life.”

133. And when they asked him where they might look for such waters, he answered them with a parable (as was his custom): “God’s paradise is irrigated and cleansed by four rivers.[165] From these you may draw the waters that will save you.

134. The name of the river that flows from the north is […], which means the right; that which flows from the west is named […], which means expiation; that which comes from the east is named […], that is, light; while that from the south is […], which may be translated as piety.”[166]

135. Advertite animum et diligenter considerate, patres, quid haec sibi velint Zoroastris dogmata: profecto nihil aliud nisi ut morali scientia, quasi

undis Hibericis, oculorum sordes expiemus; dialectica, quasi boreali amussi, illorum aciem lineemus ad rectum; tum in naturali contemplatione debile adhuc veritatis lumen, quasi nascentis solis incunabula, pati assuescamus, ut tandem per theologicam pietatem et sacratissimum deorum cultum, quasi caelestes aquilae, meridiantis solis fulgidissimum iubar fortiter perferamus.

136. Hae illae forsan et a Davide decantatae primum, et ab Augustino explicatae latius, matutinae, meridianae et vespertinae cognitiones.

137. Haec est illa lux meridialis quae Saraphinos ad lineam inflammat et Cherubinos pariter illuminat.

138. Haec illa regio quam versus semper antiquus pater Abraam proficiscebatur.

135. Now consider carefully and with your full attention, fathers, what these doctrines of Zoroaster represent. They surely mean nothing other than to induce us to wash away with moral philosophy, as in the Iberian waves, the filth from our eyes, and to straighten our gaze by dialectics, as if by the northern line.[167] Then we should accustom our eyes, in the contemplation of nature, to endure the still feeble light of truth, like the first rays of the rising sun, so that through theological piety and the most holy worship of the gods, we finally become able to endure, like heavenly eagles, the dazzling splendour of the midday sun.[168]

136. These are, perhaps, those celebrated morning, midday, and evening thoughts first sung by David and then given a wider explanation by Augustine.[169]

137. This is the noonday light that squarely enflames the seraphim and equally illuminates the cherubim.

138. This is the region toward which our ancient father Abraham was ever advancing.[170]

139. Hic ille locus ubi immundis spiritibus locum non esse et Cabalistarum et Maurorum dogmata tradiderunt.

140. Et si secretiorum aliquid mysteriorum fas est vel sub enigmate in publicum proferre, postquam et repens e caelo casus nostri hominis caput vertigine damnavit et – iuxta Hieremiam – ingressa per fenestras mors iecur pectusque male affecit, Raphaelem coelestem medicum advocemus, qui nos morali et dialectica uti pharmacis salutaribus liberet.

141. Tum ad valetudinem bonam restitutos iam Dei robur Gabriel inhabitabit, qui nos per naturae ducens miracula, ubique Dei virtutem potestatemque indicans, tandem sacerdoti summo Michaeli nos tradet, qui sub stipendiis philosophiae emeritos theologiae sacerdotio quasi corona preciosi lapidis insignet.

139. This is the place where, according to the doctrines of the cabalists and the Moors, there is no place for unclean spirits.[171]

140. And, if it may be permitted, even in the form of a riddle, to bring anything at all of the most hidden mysteries into the open[172] (inasmuch as the sudden fall from heaven has condemned the head of our man[173] to dizziness and, according to Jeremiah, death has come in through the windows to smite our livers and breasts[174]), let us call upon Raphael,[175] the heavenly physician, to set us free with moral philosophy and dialectics, as if with healing drugs.

141. Then, once we have been restored to health, Gabriel, the strength of God,[176] will abide in us and, leading us through the marvels of nature and showing us everywhere the merit and the power of God, he will finally deliver us to Michael the high priest, who will in turn bestow upon us, who

will have completed our service to philosophy, the insignia of theological priesthood,[177] as if a crown of precious stones.[178]

142. Haec sunt, patres colendissimi, quae me ad philosophiae studium non animarunt modo, sed compulerunt.

143. Quae dicturus certe non eram, nisi his responderem qui philosophiae studium in principibus praesertim viris, aut his omnino qui mediocri fortuna vivunt, damnare solent.

144. Est enim iam hoc totum philosophari (quae est nostrae etatis infoelicitas!) in contemptum potius et contumeliam, quam in honorem et gloriam.

142. These are the reasons, most reverend fathers, that have not only encouraged me but even thrust upon me the duty of studying philosophy.

143. And I would certainly not elaborate on them if I were not compelled to respond to those who are accustomed to condemning the study of philosophy, especially in men of high rank or, even more generally, in those of a middling fortune.[179]

144. For philosophizing as a whole (and this is the misfortune of our age!) is now derided and disparaged, instead of being honoured and glorified.[180]

145. Ita invasit fere omnium mentes exitialis haec et monstrosa persuasio, aut nihil aut paucis philosophandum: quasi rerum causas, naturae vias, universi rationem, Dei consilia, caelorum terraeque mysteria pre oculis, pre manibus exploratissima habere nihil sit prorsus, nisi vel gratiam inde aucupari aliquam, vel lucrum sibi quis comparare possit.

145. Thus, nearly everyone's mind has been invaded by the ruinous and monstrous conviction that either no one or only a very few may study

philosophy,[181] as if having before our eyes and at our fingertips the causes of things, the ways of nature, the logic of the universe, the divine plan, and the mysteries of Heaven and Earth[182] were of no value whatsoever unless accompanied by the possibility of garnering some favour or making a profit.

146. Quin eo deventum est ut iam (proh dolor!) non existimentur sapientes nisi qui mercennarium faciunt studium sapientiae, ut sit videre pudicam Palladem, deorum munere inter homines diversantem, eiici, explodi, exsibilari, non habere qui amet, qui faveat, nisi ipsa, quasi prostans et praefloratae virginitatis accepta mercedula, male paratum aes in amatoris arculam referat.

147. Quae omnia ego non sine summo dolore et indignatione in huius temporis non principes, sed philosophos dico, qui ideo non esse philosophandum et credunt et praedicant, quod philosophis nulla merces, nulla sint praemia constituta; quasi non ostendant ipsi, hoc uno nomine, se non esse philosophos, quod cum tota eorum vita sit vel in questu, vel in ambitione posita, ipsam per se veritatis cognitionem non amplectuntur.

146. Indeed, it has now reached the point (what sorrow!) that only those who reduce the study of wisdom[183] to a business[184] are considered wise. It is like seeing chaste Pallas,[185] who dwells among men out of the generosity of the gods, rejected, hooted off and hissed at, with no one to love or protect her, lest she, like a prostitute who accepts a pittance for her deflowered virginity, deposit the ill-earned profit into her lover's money chest.[186]

147. And I say all these things (not without the deepest grief and indignation) not against the lords of our times but against the philosophers who believe and openly declare that no one should pursue philosophy if only because there is no market for philosophers, no remuneration given to them, as if they did not reveal in this very word[187] that they are not true philosophers. Hence, insofar as their whole life has been dedicated to moneymaking and ambition, they are incapable of embracing the knowledge of truth for its own sake.

148. Dabo hoc mihi, et me ipsum hac ex parte laudare nihil erubescam, me nunquam alia de causa philosophatum nisi ut philosopharer, nec ex studiis meis, ex meis lucubrationibus mercedem ullam aut fructum vel sperasse alium vel quesiisse, quam animi cultum et a me semper plurimum desideratae veritatis cognitionem.

149. Cuius ita cupidus semper et amantissimus fui ut, relicta omni privatarum et publicarum rerum cura, contemplandi ocio totum me tradiderim, a quo nullae invidorum obtrectationes, nulla hostium sapientiae maledicta vel potuerunt ante hac, vel in posterum me deterrere poterunt.

150. Docuit me ipsa philosophia a propria potius conscientia quam ab externis pendere iuditiis, cogitareque semper non tam ne male audiam, quam ne quid male vel dicam ipse vel agam.

151. Equidem non eram nescius, patres colendissimi, futuram hanc ipsam meam disputationem quam vobis omnibus, qui bonis artibus favetis et augustissima vestra praesentia illam honestare voluistis, gratam atque iocundam, tam multis aliis gravem atque molestam; et scio non deesse qui inceptum meum et damnarint ante hac, et in praesentia multis nominibus damnent.

148. This much shall I grant myself (and I shall not blush a bit for self-praise in this regard): that I have never pursued philosophy for any other reason than for the sake of being a philosopher, nor have I ever hoped for or sought from my studies, from my queries, any reward or fruit beyond the nourishment of my mind and the knowledge of the truth, something I have always very greatly desired.

149. And I have always been so avid for it and so enamoured of it that, setting aside all private and public concerns,[188] I devoted my whole self to the leisure of contemplation,[189] from which no calumny of the envious, no slander of the enemies of wisdom, has thus far managed to distract me, nor will it in the future.

150. Philosophy herself has taught me to rely upon my own conscience rather than upon the opinions of others, and always to be careful, not so much that people do not speak badly of me as, rather, that I not say or do anything that is in itself bad.[190]

151. In fact, most reverend fathers, I was not unaware that this proposed debate of mine would be just as welcome and enjoyable to all of you who promote the good arts and have honoured this discussion with your most august presence as, on the contrary, it would be bothersome and unpleasant to many others. I furthermore realize both that there has been no lack of men who criticized my undertaking from the outset and that they still continue to do so for a variety of reasons.

152. Ita consueverunt non pauciores, ne dicam plures, habere oblatratores quae bene sancteque aguntur ad virtutem, quam quae inique et perperam ad vitium.

153. Sunt autem qui totum hoc disputandi genus et hanc de litteris publice disceptandi institutionem non approbent, ad pompam potius ingenii et doctrinae ostentationem quam ad comparandam eruditionem esse illam asseverantes.

154. Sunt qui hoc quidem exercitationis genus non improbent, sed in me nullo modo probent, quod ego hac aetate, quartum scilicet et vigesimum modo natus annum, de sublimibus Christianae theologiae mysteriis, de altissimis philosophiae locis, de incognitis disciplinis, in celebratissima urbe, in amplissimo doctissimorum hominum consessu, in apostolico senatu disputationem proponere sim ausus.

155. Alii, hoc mihi dantes, quod disputem, id dare nolunt, quod de nongentis disputem questionibus, tam superfluo et ambitiose quam supra vires id factum calumniantes.

156. Horum ego obiectamentis et manus illico dedissem, si ita quam profiteor philosophia me edocuisset, et nunc, illa ita me docente, non responderem, si rixandi iurgandique proposito constitutam hanc inter nos disceptationem crederem.

157. Quare obtrectandi omne lacessendique propositum, et quem scribit Plato a divino semper abesse choro, a nostris quoque mentibus facessat livor, et an disputandum a me, an de tot etiam quaestionibus, amice incognoscamus.

152. In truth, endeavours directed sincerely and righteously toward the attainment of virtue have always faced no fewer (indeed, often more) hecklers[191] than those directed sinfully and wrongly toward vice.

153. There are, admittedly, some who frown upon both this style of debate and the very institution of publicly disputing matters of learning. They claim that such discussions are better suited to the flaunting of wit and the display of erudition than to the acquisition of knowledge.

154. There are also others who, though not critical of this kind of exercise in itself, entirely disapprove of it in me who, born just twenty-four years ago, have at my age dared to propose a discussion on the sublime mysteries of Christian theology, on the most profound questions of philosophy, and on unexplored fields of knowledge, all in such a famous city, before a vast assembly of learned men and in the presence of the apostolic senate.

155. Still others, although they allow me the right to debate, do not wish to grant me the permission to dispute nine hundred theses, for they wrongfully consider the task and my desire to participate in it to be as superfluous and presumptuous as it is beyond the reach of my intellect.

156. I would have readily given in to their objections had I been so taught by the philosophy that I profess; nor would I now attempt to respond

to them, even with the guidance of philosophy, if I believed that this debate among us had been opened with the purpose of fighting and quarrelling.

157. Therefore, let us rid from our minds any intention to disparage and disquiet, as well as the ill will that Plato assures us is absent from the divine chorus.[192] Let us instead amiably consider both whether I am to begin this discussion and whether I should entertain so large a number of theses.[193]

158. Primum quidem ad eos, qui hunc publice disputandi morem calumniantur, multa non sum dicturus, quando haec culpa, si culpa censetur, non solum vobis omnibus, doctores excellentissimi, qui sepius hoc munere non sine summa et laude et gloria functi estis, sed Platoni, sed Aristoteli, sed probatissimis omnium etatum philosophis mecum est communis.

159. Quibus erat certissimum nihil ad consequendam quam querebant veritatis cognitionem sibi esse potius, quam ut essent in disputandi exercitatione frequentissimi.

160. Sicut enim per gymnasticam corporis vires firmiores fiunt, ita dubio procul in hac quasi litteraria palestra animi vires et fortiores longe et vegetiores evadunt.

161. Nec crediderim ego aut poetas aliud per decantata Palladis arma, aut Hebreos, cum ברזל, idest “ferrum,” שלהחכמים, idest “sapientum,” symbolum esse dicunt, significasse nobis, quam honestissima hoc genus certamina adipiscendae sapientiae oppido quam necessaria.

158. First, with regard to those who maliciously criticize this use of public disputation, I shall say very little, since this blunder, if we must call it so, has been committed on numerous occasions not only by me and by all of you, most eminent doctors, who have engaged quite often in it (and not without high honour and praise), but also by Plato, Aristotle, and all the most revered philosophers of every age.[194]

159. These men were certain that, in order to achieve the knowledge for which they searched, nothing was more beneficial than wholehearted engagement in the practice of debate.

160. In fact, just as the body’s muscles become robust through gymnastics, undoubtedly so too, in this literary gymnasium of sorts,[195] do the forces of the mind become far firmer and more vigorous.

161. Nor would I believe that the poets, in their singing of the arms of Pallas, and the Hebrews in saying that ברזל [*barzel*], “iron,”[196] is the symbol שלהחכמים [*shel-ha-ḥakhamim*], “of wise men,” can mean nothing other than that this honourable pursuit of public debate is absolutely essential to the attainment of wisdom.

162. Quo forte fit ut et Caldei, in eius genesi qui philosophus sit futurus, illud desiderent, ut Mars Mercurium triquetro aspectu conspiciat, quasi si hos congressus, haec bella substuleris, somniculosa et dormitans futura sit omnis philosophia.

163. At vero cum his qui me huic provinciae imparem dicunt, difficilior est mihi ratio defensionis: nam si parem me dixero, forsitan immodesti et de se nimia sentientis, si imparem fatebor, temerarii et inconsulti notam videor subiturus.

164. Videte quas incidi angustias, quo loco sim constitutus, dum non possum sine culpa de me promittere quod non possum mox sine culpa non praestare.

165. Forte et illud Iob afferre possem, spiritum esse in omnibus, et cum Timotheo audire: “Nemo contemnat adolescentiam tuam.”

162. Perhaps this is why the Chaldeans hope to see in the horoscope of one who is to become a philosopher[197] that Mars faces Mercury from three

separate angles;[198] it is almost as if all philosophy would become sluggish and drowsy were it not for the existence of these conflicts and debates.

163. It is more difficult for me, though, to defend myself against those who pronounce me unequal to this undertaking. If I in fact declare myself equal to it, it seems I shall be accused of immodesty and of having an excessively high opinion of myself. If, instead, I admit that I am unequal to it, I shall be charged with recklessness and imprudence.

164. See what difficulties I face,[199] what task awaits me, since I cannot blamelessly promise about myself something I must then fulfil without blame.

165. I can refer, perhaps, to Job's famous saying[200] that the spirit exists in all men, and find comfort in what Timothy was told: "Let no man despise thy young age."[201]

166. Sed ex mea verius hoc conscientia dixero, nihil esse in nobis magnum vel singulare; studiosum me forte et cupidum bonarum artium non inficiatus, docti tamen nomen mihi nec sumo nec arrogo.

167. Quare et quod tam grande humeris onus imposuerim, non fuit propterea quod mihi conscius nostrae infirmitatis non essem, sed quod sciebam hoc genus pugnis, idest litterariis, esse peculiare quod in eis lucrum est vinci.

168. Quo fit ut imbecillissimus quisque non detrectare modo, sed appetere ultro eas iure possit et debeat, quandoquidem qui succumbit beneficium a victore accipit, non iniuriam, quippe qui per eum et locupletior domum, idest doctior, et ad futuras pugnas redit instructior.

169. Hac spe animatus, ego infirmus miles cum fortissimis omnium strenuissimisque tam gravem pugnam decernere nihil sum veritus.

170. Quod tamen temere sit factum nec ne, rectius utique de eventu pugnae quam de nostra aetate potest quis iudicare.

171. Restat ut tertio loco his respondeam, qui numerosa propositarum rerum multitudine offenduntur, quasi hoc eorum humeris sederet onus, et non potius hic mihi soli quantuscumque est labor esset exanclandus.

166. To speak, though, from my own conscience, I could say with all sincerity that there is nothing great or singular about me. While I strongly uphold my own eager commitment to the good arts,[202] I do not assume or expect the title of scholar.[203]

167. Thus, though I have taken a great burden upon my shoulders,[204] it was most certainly not because I am unaware of my weaknesses; rather, I recognize that in this particular kind of clash – that is, one of a literary nature – there is profit in defeat.

168. Consequently, those who are weakest[205] should, rather than disparaging such contests, have the right, indeed the obligation, voluntarily to seek them out. He who has been defeated receives not an injury from the winner but an advantage, for, thanks to him, he returns home richer; that is, wiser and better equipped for future contests.

169. Though I am but a weak soldier, I am nonetheless enlivened by this hope, and I have no fear of combat in so difficult a battle against the strongest and most vigorous adversaries.[206]

170. Whether or not this initiative was reckless will be best decided not from my age but from the final outcome of the battle.

171. It remains in the third place[207] for me to respond to those who take offence at the very large number of my propositions, as if this burden lay on

their shoulders and it were not instead up to me alone to support its weight, no matter how great.

172. Indecens profecto hoc et morosum nimis, velle alienae industriae modum ponere, et – ut inquit Cicero – in ea re quae eo melior quo maior, mediocritatem desiderare.

173. Omnino tam grandibus ausis erat necesse me vel succumbere vel satisfacere: si satisfacerem, non video cur quod in decem praestare questionibus est laudabile, in nongentis etiam praestitisse culpabile existimetur.

174. Si succumberem, habebunt ipsi, si me oderunt, unde accusarent, si amant, unde excusent: quoniam in re tam gravi, tam magna, tenui ingenio exiguaque doctrina adolescentem hominem defecisse, venia potius dignum erit quam accusatione.

175. Quin et iuxta poetam: "… si deficiant vires, audacia certe laus erit: in magnis et voluisse sat est."

176. Quod si nostra aetate multi, Gorgiam Leontinum imitati, non modo de nongentis sed de omnibus etiam omnium artium questionibus soliti sunt, non sine laude, proponere disputationem, cur mihi non liceat, vel sine culpa, de multis quidem, sed tamen certis et determinatis disputare?

172. To be sure, it is unseemly and exceedingly patronizing to wish to set limits to another's efforts and, as Cicero says, to desire moderation in a matter where the greater is the better.[208]

173. In undertaking so great a venture, it was inevitable that I either fail or succeed. If I should succeed, I do not see why what is praiseworthy to do for ten theses should be considered blameworthy to do for nine hundred.

174. If I should fail, they will have grounds for accusing me if they hate me – and for excusing me if they love me. Indeed, a young man who has failed through lack of intelligence or want of learning in so serious and great an undertaking will certainly be more worthy of forgiveness than of blame.

175. Indeed, according to the poet: “If strength fails, audacity will surely be praised; and in great endeavours, it is enough to have willed.”[209]

176. And if many in our age, imitating Gorgias of Leontini,[210] have been accustomed, not without praise, to propose a disputation not merely on nine hundred questions but on all questions related to all arts,[211] why should I not be allowed to engage without blame in debate on questions that, though indeed numerous, are at least precise and determined?

177. “At superfluum – inquiunt – hoc, et ambitiosum.”

178. Ego vero non superfluo modo, sed necessario factum hoc a me contendo; quod et si ipsi meam philosophandi rationem considerarent, inviti etiam fateantur plane necesse est.

179. Qui enim se cuipiam ex philosophorum familiis addixerunt, Thomae videlicet aut Scoto (qui nunc plurimum in manibus) faventes, possunt illi quidem vel in paucarum questionum discussione suae doctrinae periculum facere.

180. At ego ita me institui, ut, in nullius verba iuratus, me per omnes philosophiae magistros funderem, omnes scedas excuterem, omnes familias agnoscerem.

177. But they say this is needless and audacious.

178. Yet I contend that I did this not needlessly but out of necessity, and if they should consider my philosophical method, they must admit, albeit reluctantly, that it is clearly necessary.

179. This is because those who have devoted themselves to any one of the schools of philosophy, siding for instance with Thomas[212] or with Scotus,[213] who are now most in fashion, can surely put their doctrines to the test in the discussion of but a few questions.

180. As for myself, however, I have resolved – in order not to swear by the words of another[214] – to pore over all masters of philosophy, to examine every page, and to become acquainted with all schools.[215]

181. Quare, cum mihi de illis omnibus esset dicendum, ne, si privati dogmatis defensor reliqua posthabuissem, illi viderer obstrictus, non potuerunt, etiam si pauca de singulis proponerentur, non esse plurima quae simul de omnibus afferebantur.

182. Nec id in me quisquam damnet, quod me quocumque ferat tempestas, deferar hospes.

183. Fuit enim cum ab antiquis omnibus hoc observatum, ut, omne scriptorum genus evolventes, nullas quas possent commentationes illectas preterirent, tum maxime ab Aristotele, qui eam ob causam ἀναγνώστής, idest "lector," a Platone nuncupabatur.

184. Et profecto angustae est mentis intra unam se Porticum aut Achademiam continuisse; nec potest ex omnibus sibi recte propriam selegisse, qui omnes prius familiaritates non agnoverit.

185. Adde quod in una quaque familia est aliquid insigne, quod non sit ei commune cum caeteris.

181. Therefore, since I was to speak about all of these doctrines (lest I seem committed to advocating one in particular as a result of having neglected the others), it was impossible for there not to be very many questions concerning all of them together, even if only a few questions were proposed in regard to each.[216]

182. Nor should anyone condemn me on this account, for "wherever the tempest carries me, there I am brought as a guest."[217]

183. For it was a rule observed by all the ancients in studying every kind of writer never to pass over any commentaries they were able to read, and this is especially true for Aristotle, who for this reason was called by Plato ἀναγνώστης; that is, "the reader."[218]

184. And confining oneself within a single Porch[219] or Academy[220] certainly does show narrowness of mind. Nor can anyone rightly choose his own doctrine from them all unless he has first made himself familiar with each of them.[221]

185. In addition, there is in each school something distinctive that is not shared in common with any other.

186. Atque ut a nostris, ad quos postremo philosophia pervenit, nunc exordiar, est in Ioanne Scoto vegetum quiddam atque discussum, in Thoma solidum et equabile, in Egidio tersum et exactum, in Francisco acre et acutum, in Alberto priscum, amplum et grande, in Henrico (ut mihi visum est) semper sublime et venerandum.

186. And now, to begin with our own,[222] to whom philosophy came last, we find in John [Duns] Scotus[223] something lively and meticulous, in Thomas [Aquinas][224] a balanced solidity, in Giles [of Rome][225] a neat precision, in Francis [of Meyronnes][226] a penetrating acuteness, in Albert

[the Great][227] an ancient and grand breadth, in Henry [of Ghent],[228] as it has seemed to me, a constant and venerable solemnity.[229]

187. Est apud Arabes in Averroe firmum et inconcusum, in Avempace, in Alpharabio grave et meditatum, in Avicenna divinum atque Platonicum.

188. Est apud Graecos in universum quidem nitida, in primis et casta philosophia; apud Simplicium locuplex et copiosa, apud Themistium elegans et compendiaria, apud Alexandrum constans et docta, apud Theophrastum graviter elaborata, apud Ammonium enodis et gratiosa.

187. Among the Arabs,[230] we find in Averroes[231] an unshaken firmness, in Avempace,[232] as in Al-Farabi,[233] a thoughtful seriousness, in Avicenna[234] a divine Platonic sublimity.

188. Among the Greeks,[235] philosophy is certainly limpid in general and pure in particular; in Simplicius[236] it is rich and copious, in Themistius[237] elegant and compendious, in Alexander [of Aphrodisias][238] learned and self-consistent, in Theophrastus[239] seriously worked out, in Ammonius[240] smooth and agreeable.

189. Et si ad Platonicos te converteris, ut paucos percenseam, in Porphirio rerum copia et multiiuga religione delectaberis, in Iamblico secretiorem philosophiam et barbarorum mysteria veneraberis; in Plotino privum quicquam non est quod admireris, qui se undique prebet admirandum, quem de divinis divine, de humanis longe supra hominem docta sermonis obliquitate loquentem sudantes Platonici vix intelligunt.

190. Pretereo magis novitios, Proclum Asiatica fertilitate luxuriantem, et qui ab eo fluxerunt, Hermiam, Damascium, Olympiodorum et complures alios, in quibus omnibus illud τὸ Θεῖον, idest “divinum,” peculiare Platonicorum simbolum elucet semper.

189. And if you turn to the Platonists,[241] to mention but a few, in Porphyry[242] you will be pleased by the wealth of his topics and the complexity of his religion; in Iamblichus[243] you will be awed by an occult philosophy and the mysteries of the barbarians; in Plotinus[244] there is no one thing in particular for you to admire, for he offers himself to admiration in every part. Even the Platonists themselves struggle to understand his wisely allusive discourse when he speaks divinely of things divine and when he speaks of human things in a way that far surpasses humanity.

190. I shall pass over the more recent ones, such as Proclus,[245] who abounds in Asian fecundity, and those who stem from him, Hermias,[246] Damascius,[247] Olympiodorus,[248] and many others, in all of whom there always shines forth that τὸ Θεῖον – that is, that divine something which is the distinctive mark of the Platonists.

191. Accedit quod, si qua est heresis quae veriora incessat dogmata et bonas causas ingenii calumnia ludificetur, ea veritatem firmat, non infirmat, et velut motu quassatam flammam excitat, non extinguit.

192. Hac ego ratione motus, non unius modo (ut quibusdam placebat), sed omnigenae doctrinae placita in medium afferre volui, ut hac complurium sectarum collatione ac multifariae discussione philosophiae ille veritatis fulgor, cuius Plato meminit in epistolis, animis nostris quasi sol oriens ex alto clarius illucesceret.

193. Quid erat si Latinorum tantum, Alberti scilicet, Thomae, Scoti, Egidii, Francisci Henricique philosophia, obmissis Graecorum Arabumque philosophis, tractabatur, quando omnis sapientia a barbaris ad Graecos, a Graecis ad nos manavit?

194. Ita nostrates semper in philosophandi ratione peregrinis inventis stare et aliena excoluisse sibi duxerunt satis.

191. One should also add that when some school attacks the more established truths and derisively slanders valid arguments of reason, it strengthens rather than weakens the truth, which – like a flame that is stirred by agitation – is thus enkindled rather than extinguished.[249]

192. Spurred on by this reasoning, I wished to bring to light the opinions not only of a single doctrine (as some would have liked) but of every school of thought, so that, through the comparison of many schools and the discussion of several philosophies, that "effulgence of truth" which Plato mentions in his letters might more intensely illuminate our minds, like the sun rising from the deep.[250]

193. Inasmuch as all wisdom has flowed from the barbarians to the Greeks and from the Greeks to us, what would have been the point of dealing only with the philosophy of the Latins – that is, of Albert, Thomas, Scotus, Giles, Francis, and Henry – while leaving the Greek and Arab philosophers aside?[251]

194. Thus, our authors have always seen fit, in matters of philosophy, to ground themselves in foreign discoveries and to perfect the doctrines of others.[252]

195. Quid erat cum Peripateticis egisse de naturalibus, nisi et Platonicorum accersebatur Achademia, quorum doctrina et de divinis semper inter omnes philosophias, teste Augustino, habita est sanctissima, et a me nunc primum, quod sciam (verbo absit invidia), post multa secula sub disputandi examen est in publicum allata?

196. Quid erat et aliorum quot quot erant tractasse opiniones, si, quasi ad sapientum symposium asymboli accedentes, nihil nos quod esset nostrum, nostro partum et elaboratum ingenio, afferebamus?

197. Profecto ingenerosum est (ut ait Seneca) sapere solum ex commentario et, quasi maiorum inventa nostrae industriae viam

praecluserint, quasi in nobis effaeta sit vis naturae, nihil ex se parere quod veritatem, si non demonstret, saltem innuat vel de longinquo.

198. Quod si in agro colonus, in uxore maritus odit sterilitatem, certe tanto magis infecundam animam oderit illi complicita et associata divina mens, quanto inde nobilior longe proles desideratur.

195. What point would there have been in dealing with natural things alongside the Peripatetics without also invoking the Platonic Academy? Their doctrine on divine things, as Augustine shows,[253] has always been considered the most sacred of all philosophies; this is a doctrine that, as far as I know, is now being brought forward by me for the first time after many centuries (may my words inspire no envy) to be submitted for public debate.

196. And what would have been the point of dealing with the opinions of others, no matter how many there were, if I – like he who comes to the banquet of the wise without contributing anything[254] – were to bring nothing of my own, nothing born of and elaborated with my own mind?[255]

197. It is certainly undignified, as Seneca says,[256] to know only through books and, as though the discoveries of our ancestors had barred the way to our own industriousness and the power of nature were exhausted in us, to bring about from ourselves nothing that, even if it fell short of demonstrating the truth, might at least hint at it from afar.

198. For if a farmer hates sterility in his field and a husband hates it in his wife,[257] the Divine Mind will certainly hate even more the barren soul that is joined and associated with It, insofar as it is a far nobler offspring that is desired.

199. Propterea non contentus ego, praeter communes doctrinas, multa de Mercurii Trismegisti prisca theologia, multa de Caldeorum, de Pythagorae disciplinis, multa de secretioribus Hebreorum addidisse mysteriis, plurima

quoque per nos inventa et meditata de naturalibus et divinis rebus disputanda proposuimus.

200. Proposuimus primo Platonis Aristotelisque concordiam, a multis ante hac creditam, a nemine satis probatam.

199. Hence, I have not been content simply to add, beside the common doctrines, many principles taken from the ancient theology of Hermes Trismegistus,[258] many more drawn from the teachings of the Chaldeans[259] and Pythagoras,[260] and many others deriving from the more secret mysteries of the Hebrews,[261] and I have also proposed for disputation a good many discoveries and reflections of my own,[262] both on things natural and divine.

200. In the first place, I have proposed the concord of Plato and Aristotle, believed by many before me but adequately proven by none.[263]

201. Boetius, apud Latinos id se facturum pollicitus, non invenitur fecisse unquam quod semper facere voluit.

202. Simplicius, apud Graecos idem professus, utinam id tam praestaret quam pollicetur!

203. Scribit et Augustinus in *Achademicis* non defuisse plures qui subtilissimis suis disputationibus idem probare conati sint, Platonis scilicet et Aristotelis eandem esse philosophiam.

204. Ioannes item Grammaticus, cum dicat apud eos tantum dissidere Platonem ab Aristotele qui Platonis dicta non intelligunt, probandum tamen posteris hoc reliquit.

205. Addidimus autem et plures locos in quibus Scoti et Thomae, plures in quibus Averrois et Avicennae sententias, quae discordes existimantur,

concordes esse nos asseveramus.

201. Among the Latins, Boethius promised to do it, but there is no evidence that he ever did what he always wished to do.[264]

202. Among the Greeks, Simplicius made the same declaration, and if only he had fulfilled his promise![265]

203. Augustine,[266] too, writes that there were not a few Academics who tried with their most subtle arguments to prove the same thing – namely, that the philosophies of Plato and Aristotle were one.

204. Likewise John [Philoponus] the Grammarian, who,[267] although he says that Plato differs from Aristotle only for those who do not understand what Plato says,[268] nevertheless left it to posterity to prove.

205. I have also added many theses in which I maintain that several statements by Thomas and Scotus that are thought to be discordant are in agreement,[269] and many others in which I maintain the same about statements by Averroes and Avicenna.[270]

206. Secundo loco quae in philosophia cum Aristotelica tum Platonica excogitavimus nos, tum duo et septuaginta nova dogmata physica et metaphysica collocavimus, quae si quis teneat, poterit, nisi fallor (quod mihi erit mox manifestum), quamcumque de rebus naturalibus divinisque propositam questionem longe alia dissolvere ratione quam per eam edoceamur quae et legitur in scolis et ab huius evi doctoribus colitur philosophiam.

207. Nec tam admirari quis debet, patres, me in primis annis, in tenera etate, per quam vix licuit (ut iactant quidam) aliorum legere commentationes, novam afferre velle philosophiam, quam vel laudare illam si defenditur, vel damnare si reprobatur; et denique, cum nostra inventa

haec nostrasque sint litteras iudicaturi, non auctoris annos, sed illorum merita potius vel demerita numerare.

206. In the second place, I have presented not only my discoveries in Aristotelian and Platonic philosophy[271] but also seventy-two new theses,[272] which I have proposed both in physics and in metaphysics. Whoever grasps these theses will be able – if I am not mistaken, as I shall soon see – to solve any question put to him regarding things natural and divine by a method quite unlike that of the philosophy taught in schools and cultivated by the doctors of this age.

207. Nor should anyone be much amazed, fathers, that in my youth, at a tender age at which (as some propose) I should hardly have been allowed to read the works of others, I wish to introduce a new philosophy;[273] instead, let this philosophy be either praised if it is defensible or condemned if it is refutable. When my discoveries and my writings are eventually judged, one should tally up not the years of their author but rather their merits or demerits.

208. Est autem, et praeter illam, alia quam nos attulimus nova per numeros philosophandi institutio, antiqua illa quidem et a priscis theologis, a Pythagora presertim, ab Aglaophemo, a Philolao, a Platone prioribusque Platonicis observata; sed quae hac tempestate, ut preclara alia, posteriorum incuria sic exolevit, ut vix vestigia ipsius ulla reperiantur.

209. Scribit Plato in *Epinomide* inter omnes liberales artes et scientias contemplatrices praecipuam maximeque divinam esse scientiam numerandi.

210. Quaerens item cur homo animal sapientissimum, respondet: “Quia numerare novit”; cuius sententiae et Aristoteles meminit in *Problematis*.

208. There is, moreover, still another method of philosophizing (one that is carried out with numbers), which I have presented as new but which is in fact old, and was observed by the ancient theologians,[274] by Pythagoras in

particular, by Aglaophamos,[275] Philolaus,[276] and Plato, and by the earlier Platonists.[277] But in our age this doctrine, like other famous ones, has so fallen into disuse on account of the carelessness of posterity that hardly any traces of it remain.

209. Plato writes in the *Epinomis* that, among all liberal arts and contemplative sciences, the principal and most divine is the science of numbers.

210. And again, asking why man is the wisest of animals, he answers: “Because he knows how to count.”[278] Aristotle also mentions this response in his *Problems*.[279]

211. Scribit Abumasar verbum fuisse Avenzoar Babilonii eum omnia nosse, qui noverat numerare.

212. Quae vera esse nullo modo possunt, si per numerandi artem eam artem intellexerunt cuius nunc mercatores in primis sunt peritissimi; quod et Plato testatur, exerta nos admonens voce ne divinam hanc arithmeticam mercatoriam esse arithmeticam intelligamus.

213. Illam ergo arithmeticam, quae ita extollitur, cum mihi videar post multas lucubrationes exploratam habere, huiusce rei periculum facturus, ad quatuor et septuaginta questiones, quae inter physicas et divinas principales existimantur, responsurum per numeros publice me sum pollicitus.

211. Abumasar[280] writes that it was a saying of Avenzoar of Babylon[281] that he who knows how to count knows all things.

212. None of these things could possibly have been true if they had taken the art of numbering to be that same one at which merchants are now especially skilful. Plato attests to this as well[282] when he openly warns us not to believe that this divine arithmetic is the mathematics of the merchants.

213. Since it seemed to me, after long nights of study, that I had thoroughly examined that arithmetic which is so praised, I made up my mind to put these matters to the test and promised that I would answer in public, through the art of numbering, the seventy-four questions[283] that are considered most important in matters natural and divine.

214. Proposuimus et magica theoremata, in quibus duplicem esse magiam significavimus, quarum altera demonum tota opere et auctoritate constat, res medius fidius execranda et portentosa; altera nihil est aliud, cum bene exploratur, quam naturalis philosophiae absoluta consumatio.

215. Utriusque cum meminerint Greci, illam, magiae nullo modo nomine dignantes, γοητείἀν nuncupant; hanc propria peculiarique appellatione μαγείἀν, quasi perfectam summamque sapientiam, vocant.

216. Idem enim, ut ait Porphyrius, Persarum lingua "magus" sonat quod apud nos "divinorum interpres et cultor."

217. Magna autem, immo maxima, patres, inter has artes disparilitas et dissimilitudo.

218. Illam non modo Christiana religio, sed omnes leges, omnis bene instituta respublica damnat et execratur; hanc omnes sapientes, omnes caelestium et divinarum rerum studiosae nationes approbant et amplectuntur.

214. I have also proposed some theses regarding magic[284] in which I have shown that there are two forms of magic: one is based entirely on the deeds and powers of demons (and is, in truth, an execrable and monstrous thing); the other, when keenly examined, is nothing but the absolute perfection of natural philosophy.

215. The Greeks mentioned both of them, but they call the former γοητείἀν (dignifying it in no way with the name of magic), whereas they call the

latter by the proper and exclusive name of μαγείάν, the perfect and highest wisdom, as it were.[285]

216. As a matter fact, as Porphyry says,[286] “magus” in the Persian language means the same as “expert and interpreter of divine things” in ours.

217. So, fathers, there is a great or even the greatest difference and disparity[287] between these two arts.

218. The former is condemned and abhorred not only by the Christian religion but by all laws and every well-ordered state. The latter is approved and embraced by all wise men and by all peoples devoted to heavenly and divine things.

219. Illa artium fraudulentissima, haec altior sanctiorque philosophia; illa irrita et vana, haec firma, fidelis et solida.

220. Illam quisquis coluit semper dissimulavit, quod in auctoris esset ignominiam et contumeliam; ex hac summa litterarum claritas gloriaque antiquitus et pene semper petita.

219. The former is the most deceitful of arts; the latter is the highest and most holy philosophy. The former is sterile and vain; the latter is sure, reliable, and firm.[288]

220. The former has always been concealed by whoever has practiced it because it would have brought shame and disrepute to anyone who wrote about it, whereas the highest literary renown and glory have since antiquity almost always been sought from the latter.[289]

221. Illius nemo unquam studiosus fuit vir philosophus et cupidus discendi bonas artes; ad hanc Pythagoras, Empedocles, Democritus, Plato

discendam navigavere, hanc predicarunt reversi, et in archanis precipuam habuerunt.

221. No philosopher, nor any man eager to learn the good arts, has ever applied himself to the study of the former, but Pythagoras, Empedocles,[290] Plato, and Democritus[291] crossed the seas to learn the latter, taught it when they returned, and considered it chief among the arcane doctrines.[292]

222. Illa, ut nullis rationibus, ita nec certis probatur auctoribus; haec, clarissimis quasi parentibus honestata, duos precipue habet auctores: Xamolsidem, quem imitatus est Abbaris Hyperboreus, et Zoroastrem, non quem forte creditis, sed illum Oromasi filium.

222. The former is neither based on any principles nor approved by any reliable author; the latter, ennobled, as it were, by the most celebrated parents, has two authors above all: Zalmolxis,[293] who was imitated by Abaris the Hyperborean,[294] and Zoroaster,[295] not the one of whom perhaps you are thinking[296] but the son of Oromasius.[297]

223. Utriusque magia quid sit Platonem si percontemur, respondebit in *Alcibiade* Zoroastris magiam non esse aliud quam divinorum scientiam, qua filios Persarum reges erudiebant, ut ad exemplar mundanae reipublicae suam ipsi regere rempublicam edocerentur; respondebit in *Carmide* magiam Xamolsidis esse animi medicinam, per quam scilicet animo temperantia, ut per illam corpori sanitas comparatur.

223. If we ask Plato what the magic of both these men is, he will answer in the *Alcibiades* that the magic of Zoroaster is nothing other than that science of divine things in which the kings of the Persians educated their sons so that they might learn to rule their state in accordance with the example of the order of the universe.[298] And in the *Charmides*[299] he will answer that the magic of Zamolxis is the medicine of the soul, or that medicine by which temperance is obtained for the soul, just as by the other medicine health is obtained for the body.

224. Horum vestigiis postea perstiterunt Carondas, Damigeron, Apollonius, Hostanes et Dardanus; perstitit Homerus, quem ut omnes alias sapientias, ita hanc quoque sub sui Ulixis erroribus dissimulasse in poetica nostra theologia aliquando probabimus; perstiterunt Eudoxus et Hermippus, perstiterunt fere omnes qui Pythagorica Platonicaque mysteria sunt perscrutati.

224. Afterward, Charondas,[300] Damigeron,[301] Apollonius,[302] Osthanes,[303] and Dardanus[304] followed in their footsteps. And so did Homer, who likewise concealed this wisdom, just as he concealed all the others, beneath the wanderings of his Ulysses, as I shall eventually prove in my *Poetic Theology*.[305] Eudoxus and Hermippus also followed this path,[306] and so, too, did almost everyone else who has assiduously investigated the Pythagorean and Platonic mysteries.

225. Ex iunioribus autem qui eam olfecerint tres reperio, Alchindum Arabem, Rogerium Baconem et Guilielmum Parisiensem.

226. Meminit et Plotinus, ubi naturae ministrum esse et non artificem magum demonstrat: hanc magiam probat asseveratque vir sapientissimus, alteram ita abhorrens ut, cum ad malorum demonum sacra vocaretur, rectius esse dixerit ad se illos quam se ad illos accedere.

225. Among the later philosophers, then, I find three who have got a whiff of it: the Arabian Al-Kindi,[307] Roger Bacon,[308] and William of Paris.[309]

226. Plotinus also mentions it,[310] where he shows that a magus is the minister and not the maker of nature. That most wise man approves and justifies this kind of magic, so abhorring the other that, invited to the rites of evil demons, he says that it was more fitting for them to come to him than for him to go to them.

227. Et merito quidem: ut enim illa obnoxium mancipatumque improbis potestatibus hominem reddit, ita haec illarum principem et dominum.

228. Illa denique nec artis nec scientiae sibi potest nomen vendicare; haec, altissimis plena mysteriis, profundissimam rerum secretissimarum contemplationem et demum totius naturae cognitionem complectitur.

229. Haec, intersparsas Dei beneficio et interseminatas mundo virtutes quasi de latebris evocans in lucem, non tam facit miranda, quam facienti naturae sedula famulatur.

227. And rightly so,[311] for just as the former makes man a slave and a minion of wicked powers, the latter makes him their lord and master.

228. The former, in the end, cannot claim for itself the name either of art or of science, whereas the latter, full as it is of the loftiest mysteries, comprises the deepest contemplation of the most secret things and ultimately the knowledge of all nature.

229. The latter, in calling out, as it were, from their hiding places into the light the good powers sown and scattered here and there in the world by God's beneficence, does not so much perform miracles as sedulously act as the servant of nature, which in turn performs them.

230. Haec universi consensum, quem significantius Graeci συμπάθειαν dicunt, introrsum perscrutatius rimata, et mutuam naturarum cognationem habens perspectatam, nativas adhibens unicuique rei et suas illecebras, quae magorum ἴυγγες nominantur, in mundi recessibus, in naturae gremio, in promptuariis archanisque Dei latitantia miracula, quasi ipsa sit artifex, promit in publicum; et sicut agricola ulmos vitibus, ita magus terram caelo, idest inferiora superiorum dotibus virtutibusque maritat.

230. The latter has quite profoundly probed into that harmony of the universe that the Greeks more expressively call συμπάθειαν,[312] and has

discerned the mutual kinship[313] that natures share. It assigns to each thing its innate charms (which are called the ἴυγγες[314] of the magicians) and brings out into the open, as if it were itself their cause, the miracles lying hidden in the recesses of the world, in the womb of nature, in the mysterious storerooms of God. Just as the farmer marries elm to vine,[315] so does the magus marry earth to heaven – that is, the lower things to the endowments and powers of the higher.[316]

231. Quo fit ut quam illa prodigiosa et noxia, tam haec divina et salutaris appareat: ob hoc praecipue, quod illa hominem, Dei hostibus mancipans, avocat a Deo, haec in eam operum Dei admirationem excitat, quam propensa charitas, fides ac spes, certissime consequuntur.

232. Neque enim ad religionem, ad Dei cultum quicquam promovet magis quam assidua contemplatio mirabilium Dei, quae ut per hanc de qua agimus naturalem magiam bene exploraverimus, in opificis cultum amoremque ardentius animati, illud canere compellemur: “Pleni sunt caeli, plena est omnis terra maiestate gloriae tuae.”

233. Et haec satis de magia, de qua haec diximus, quod scio esse plures qui, sicut canes ignotos semper adlatrant, ita et ipsi saepe damnant oderuntque quae non intelligunt.

234. Venio nunc ad ea quae, ex antiquis Hebreorum mysteriis eruta, ad sacrosanctam et catholicam fidem confirmandam attuli; quae ne forte ab his, quibus sunt ignota, commentitiae nugae aut fabulae circumlatorum existimentur, volo intelligant omnes quae et qualia sint, unde petita, quibus et quam claris auctoribus confirmata, et quam reposita, quam divina, quam nostris hominibis ad propugnandam religionem contra Hebreorum importunas calumnias sint necessaria.

231. Hence, the latter is consequently revealed to be just as divine and salutary as the former is monstrous and harmful. It is precisely on this account that the former, in subjecting man to the enemies of God, drives him away from God, whereas the latter stimulates him to admire God’s

works, which is the state of mind that most surely gives rise to well-disposed faith, hope, and charity.

232. For nothing better induces us to religion and to the worship of God than the assiduous contemplation of His wonders. Once we have aptly examined them by means of this natural magic I am discussing, we shall be all the more ardently aroused to the worship and love of their Creator, and shall be forced to sing: "The heavens are full, all the earth is full with the majesty of Thy glory."[317]

233. But this is enough on magic, regarding which I have said this much because I know that there are many who, just as dogs always bark at strangers, likewise often hate and condemn what they do not understand.

234. I come now to those things that I deduced from the ancient mysteries of the Hebrews and that I cite as confirmation of the sacrosanct and Catholic faith. So that these things not be considered, by those who are ignorant of such matters, imaginary trifles or the fables of storytellers,[318] I wish to explain to all men what they are and what they are like; where they come from; by whom and by how many enlightened authors they are confirmed; and how enigmatic, how divine, how necessary they are to those of our own faith for the safeguard of our religion against the importunate calumnies of the Jews.[319]

235. Scribunt non modo celebres Hebreorum doctores, sed ex nostris quoque Hesdras, Hilarius et Origenes, Mosen non legem modo, quam quinque exaratam libris posteris reliquit, sed secretiorem quoque et veram legis enarrationem in monte divinitus accepisse; preceptum autem ei a Deo ut legem quidem populo publicaret, legis interpretationem nec traderet litteris, nec invulgaret, sed ipse Iesu Nave tantum, tum ille aliis deinceps succedentibus sacerdotum primoribus, magna silentii religione revelaret.

235. Not only the celebrated Hebrew doctors but also some among our own,[320] such as Esdras,[321] Hilary,[322] and Origen,[323] write that Moses received from God on the mount not only the five books of the Law[324] that

he bequeathed to posterity but also a true and more secret exposition of the Law.[325] God commanded him to proclaim the Law to the people but never to put the interpretation of the Law into writing, nor divulge it, but to communicate it only to Jesu Nave,[326] who would in turn reveal it, under a solemn vow of secrecy, to his successors among the high priests.[327]

236. Satis erat per simplicem historiam nunc Dei potentiam, nunc in improbos iram, in bonos clementiam, in omnes iustitiam agnoscere, et per divina salutariaque precepta ad bene beateque vivendum et cultum verae religionis institui.

237. At mysteria secretiora et sub cortice legis rudique verborum pretextu latitantia, altissimae divinitatis archana, plebi palam facere, quid erat aliud quam dare sanctum canibus et inter porcos spargere margaritas?

236. The simple story was sufficient to recognize now God's power, now His wrath against the wicked, His mercy toward the good, or His justice before all.[328] Divine and salutary precepts were sufficient to learn about the goodly and blessed life, the worship of true religion.[329]

237. But to make public to the populace the most secret mysteries and the profoundest arcana of divinity concealed beneath the bark[330] of the Law and the rough vestiture of language,[331] what else could this have been but to give holy things to the dogs and to cast pearls before swine?[332]

238. Ergo haec clam vulgo habere, perfectis communicanda (inter quos tantum sapientiam loqui se ait Paulus), non humani consilii, sed divini precepti fuit; quem morem antiqui philosophi sanctissime observarunt.

239. Pythagoras nihil scripsit nisi paucula quaedam, quae Damae filiae moriens commendavit.

240. Egyptiorum templis insculptae Sphinges hoc admonebant, ut mystica dogmata per enigmatum nodos a prophana multitudine inviolata

custodirentur.

238. Therefore, the custom of keeping from the masses these things that were to be conveyed only to the perfect[333] (among whom only Paul[334] declared that he wished to speak of wisdom) derived not from human counsel but from divine commandment[335] and was a practice that the ancient philosophers solemnly observed.

239. Pythagoras wrote nothing but a few insignificant things that he entrusted to his daughter Dama[336] on his deathbed.

240. The Sphinxes carved[337] on the temples of the Egyptians admonished them that the mystical doctrines should be kept inviolate from the profane multitude by the knots of enigmas.[338]

241. Plato, Dionysio quaedam de supremis scribens substantiis, “per enigmata – inquit – dicendum est, ne si epistola forte ad aliorum pervenerit manus, quae tibi scribimus ab aliis intelligantur.”

242. Aristoteles libros *Metaphysicae*, in quibus agit de divinis, editos esse et non editos dicebat.

243. Quid plura? Iesum Christum vitae magistrum asserit Origenes multa revelasse discipulis, quae illi, ne vulgo fierent comunia, scribere noluerunt.

244. Quod maxime confirmat Dionysius Areopagita, qui secretiora mysteria a nostrae religionis auctoribus ἐκ νοὸς εἰς νοῦν, διὰ μέσου λόγου, idest ex animo in animum, sine litteris, medio intercedente verbo ait fuisse transfusa.

241. Plato, writing certain things to Dionysius[339] regarding the supreme substances, explained: “It is necessary to write in enigmas, for should this

letter perchance fall into the hands of others, they would then be unable to understand what I have written to you."

242. Aristotle used to say that the books of the *Metaphysics*, in which he deals with divine things, were published and unpublished.[340]

243. What else? According to Origen, Jesus Christ, the Teacher of Life,[341] revealed many things to His disciples, which they refused to write down so that these things would not be communicated to the common people.

244. This is conclusively confirmed by Dionysius the Areopagite,[342] according to whom the secret mysteries were transmitted to the founders of our religion, "ἐκ νοὸς εἰς νοῦν, διὰ μέσου λόγου"[343] – that is, from mind to mind – without writing, through the intercession of the word.[344]

245. Hoc eodem penitus modo cum ex Dei praecepto vera illa legis interpretatio Moisi deitus tradita revelaretur, dicta est Cabala, quod idem est apud Hebreos quod apud nos "receptio"; ob id scilicet, quod illam doctrinam non per litterarum monumenta, sed ordinariis revelationum successionibus alter ab altero quasi hereditario iure reciperet.

246. Verum postquam Hebrei, a Babilonica captivitate restituti per Cyrum et sub Zorobabel instaurato templo, ad reparandam legem animum appulerunt, Esdras, tunc ecclesiae praefectus, post emendatum Moseos librum, cum plane cognoscerent per exilia, cedes, fugas, captivitatem gentis Israeliticae institutum a maioribus morem tradendae per manus doctrinae servari non posse, futurumque ut sibi divinitus indulta celestis doctrinae archana perirent, quorum commentariis non intercedentibus durare diu memoria non poterat, constituit ut, convocatis qui tunc supererant sapientibus, afferret unusquisque in medium quae de mysteriis legis memoriter tenebat, adhibitisque notariis in septuaginta volumina (tot enim fere in sinedrio sapientes) redigerentur.

245. Once the Law's genuine interpretation, which God conveyed to Moses, had been revealed in this same private way, it was called "Cabala,"[345] which means to the Hebrews what "reception"[346] means to us (doubtlessly because this doctrine was received not through written documents but through orderly successions of revelations from one man to another, almost by hereditary right).

246. However, after Cyrus[347] restored the Hebrews from the Babylonian Exile,[348] and once the Temple had been rebuilt under the rule of Zerubbabel,[349] the Hebrews turned their minds toward the reestablishment of the Law. Esdras[350] (who was then the leader of the people), having amended the books of Moses, clearly realized that – following the exiles, the massacres, the flights and captivity of the people of Israel – the custom instituted by their ancestors for handing down the doctrines could no longer be preserved and that the mysteries of this divinely conveyed celestial doctrine would fade into oblivion in the absence of written documents since they could no longer endure in memory alone. Thus, he decided that those sages who were still alive should be convened,[351] that each of them should share with the others whatever he could recall of the mysteries of the Law, and that scribes be employed to record it all in seventy volumes[352] (roughly the same as the number of sages in the Sanhedrin).[353]

247. Qua de re ne mihi soli credatis, patres, audite Esdram ipsum sic loquentem: "Exactis quadraginta diebus loquutus est Altissimus dicens: 'Priora quae scripsisti in palam pone, legant digni et indigni, novissimos autem septuaginta libros conservabis ut tradas eos sapientibus de populo tuo; in his enim est vena intellectus et sapientiae fons et scientiae flumen.'

248. Atque ita feci."

249. Haec Esdras ad verbum.

250. Hi sunt libri scientiae Cabalae; in his libris merito Esdras venam intellectus, idest ineffabilem de supersubstantiali deitate theologiam,

sapientiae fontem, idest de intelligibilibus angelicisque formis exactam metaphysicam, et scientiae flumen, idest de rebus naturalibus firmissimam philosophiam esse clara in primis voce pronuntiavit.

251. Hi libri Sixtus quartus Pontifex Maximus, qui hunc sub quo vivimus foeliciter Innocentium VIII proxime antecessit, maxima cura studioque curavit ut in publicam fidei nostrae utilitatem Latinis litteris mandarentur; iamque cum ille decessit, tres ex illis pervenerant ad Latinos.

247. So that you need not believe only me, fathers, hear what Esdras himself says: "At the end of forty days, the Most High spoke, saying, 'That which you first wrote, set forth clearly so that the worthy and unworthy alike may read it, but keep to yourself the most recent seventy books so that you may hand them over to the wisest among your people. In them are the vein of intellect, and the fountain of wisdom, and the river of science.'

248. And I did so."[354]

249. These are the words of Esdras to the letter.

250. These are the books of the science of the Cabala.[355] These tomes, as Esdras[356] rightly proclaimed, clearly and from the outset, contain a vein of understanding – in other words, the ineffable theology of the supersubstantial deity – a font of wisdom that is the exact metaphysics of the intelligible and angelic forms, and the river of science that is the most steadfast philosophy of natural things.[357]

251. Pope Sixtus IV[358] – who immediately preceded Innocent VIII,[359] under whom we live in happiness – arranged, with the utmost care and concern, for these books to be translated[360] into Latin for the common good of those of our faith.[361] At the time of his death, three of them were already available in Latin.[362]

252. Hi libri apud Hebreos hac tempestate tanta religione coluntur, ut neminem liceat nisi annos quadraginta natum illos attingere.

253. Hos ego libros non mediocri impensa mihi cum comparassem, summa diligentia indefessis laboribus cum perlegissem, vidi in illis (testis est Deus) religionem non tam Mosaycam, quam Christianam.

254. Ibi Trinitatis mysterium, ibi Verbi incarnatio, ibi Messiae divinitas; ibi de peccato originali, de illius per Christum expiatione, de caelesti Hyerusalem, de casu demonum, de ordinibus angelorum, de purgatoriis, de inferorum paenis eadem legi quae apud Paulum et Dionysium, apud Hieronymum et Augustinum quotidie legimus.

252. These books are held in such religious awe by the Jews of today that no one under the age of forty is permitted to approach them.[363]

253. I purchased these books at no little cost to myself,[364] and when I perused them with the greatest diligence and unstinting labour, I saw in them (as God is my witness) not so much the Mosaic as the Christian religion.[365]

254. Here is the mystery of the Trinity,[366] here the Incarnation[367] of the Word, here the divinity of the Messiah;[368] here of original sin,[369] of its expiation through Christ,[370] of the heavenly Jerusalem,[371] of the fall of the demons, of the hierarchy of the angels, of Purgatory, of the punishments in Hell.[372] I saw the same things that we read every day in Paul, Dionysius, Jerome,[373] and Augustine.[374]

255. In his vero quae spectant ad philosophiam, Pythagoram prorsus audias et Platonem, quorum decreta ita sunt fidei Christianae affinia, ut Augustinus noster immensas Deo gratias agat quod ad eius manus pervenerint libri Platonicorum.

256. In plenum nulla est ferme de re nobis cum Hebreis controversia de qua ex libris Cabalistarum ita redargui convincique non possint, ut ne angulus quidem reliquus sit in quem se condant.

257. Cuius rei testem gravissimum habeo Antonium Cronicum, virum eruditissimum, qui suis auribus, cum apud eum essem in convivio, audivit Dactylum Hebreum peritum huius scientiae in Christianorum prorsus de Trinitate sententiam pedibus manibusque descendere.

258. Sed ut ad meae redeam disputationis capita percensenda, attulimus et nostram de interpretandis Orphei Zoroastrisque carminibus sententiam.

259. Orpheus apud Graecos ferme integer; Zoroaster apud eos mancus, apud Caldeos absolutior legitur: ambo priscae sapientiae crediti patres et auctores.

260. Nam, ut taceam de Zoroastre, cuius frequens apud Platonicos non sine summa semper veneratione est mentio, scribit Iamblicus Calcideus habuisse Pythagoram Orphycam theologiam tamquam exemplar ad quam ipse suam fingeret formaretque philosophiam.

255. As for those matters pertaining to philosophy, it truly seems you are hearing Pythagoras or Plato, whose conclusions bear such affinity to the Christian faith that our own Augustine pronounced immense gratitude to God that the Platonic books made their way into his hands.[375]

256. On the whole, there is no point of controversy between us and the Jews on which the latter could not be refuted and convinced by means of the cabalistic books, so that no corner will remain in which they may take refuge.[376]

257. On this matter, I have a most trustworthy witness in the most erudite Antonius Chronicus,[377] who, at a banquet at his house at which I

was present, heard with his own ears Dactylus the Jew himself,[378] an expert in this science, wholeheartedly acknowledge the Christian tenet of the Trinity.

258. But to return to reviewing the theses of my disputation, I have also presented my own interpretation of the songs of Orpheus and Zoroaster.[379]

259. Orpheus is extant among the Greeks in an almost complete text; Zoroaster is lacunose among the Greeks but among the Chaldeans is read in a more complete text. Both are credited with being the fathers and authors of ancient wisdom.[380]

261. Quin idcirco tantum dicta Pythagorae sacra nuncupari dicunt, quod ab Orphei fluxerint institutis; inde secreta de numeris doctrina et quicquid magnum sublimeque habuit Graeca philosophia ut a primo fonte manavit.

262. Sed (qui erat veterum mos theologorum) ita Orpheus suorum dogmatum mysteria fabularum intexit involucris et poetico velamento dissimulavit, ut si quis legat illius hymnos, nihil subesse credat praeter fabellas nugasque meracissimas.

263. Quod volui dixisse ut cognoscatur quis mihi labor, quae fuerit difficultas ex affectatis enigmatum syrpis, ex fabularum latebris latitantes eruere secretae philosophiae sensus, nulla praesertim in re tam gravi, tam abscondita inexplorataque adiuto aliorum interpretum opera et diligentia.

264. Et tamen oblatrarunt canes mei minutula quaedam et levia ad numeri ostentationem me accumulasse: quasi non omnes quae ambiguae maxime controversaeque sunt quaestiones, in quibus principales digladiantur achademiae, quasi non multa attulerim his ipsis, qui et mea carpunt et se credunt philosophorum principes, et incognita prorsus et intentata.

265. Quin ego tantum absum ab ea culpa, ut curaverim in quam paucissima potui capita cogere disputationem; quam si (ut consueverunt alii) partiri ipse in sua membra et lancinare voluissem, in innumerum profecto numerum excrevisset.

260. Indeed, to say nothing of Zoroaster, who is often mentioned by the Platonists and always with the utmost veneration, Iamblichus of Chalcis writes that Pythagoras regarded Orphic theology as the model on which he fashioned and formed his own philosophy.[381]

261. As a matter of fact, it is said for this reason alone that the Pythagorean maxims are thought to be sacred, for they derive from the Orphic teachings; from this first source flowed forth the secret doctrine of numbers[382] and everything that is great and sublime in Greek philosophy.[383]

262. However, Orpheus (as was the practice among the ancient theologians) so well concealed the mysteries of his dogmas under the coverings of fables and hid them under the veil of poetry that, if one were to read his hymns, one would believe there is nothing more behind them than the most commonplace tales and trifles.

263. I wished to say this so as to make known what trouble and what difficulties I faced in freeing from the tangle of riddles and the obscurity of fables the meaning of this secret philosophy,[384] especially since I could not rely on assistance in a matter so important, so hidden and unexplored, from the work or diligence of any other interpreters.

264. Nevertheless, the dogs have barked[385] that I have ostentatiously accumulated a large number of minutia and trivialities, as if all of them were not the most ambiguous and controversial questions over which the principal academies are now in pitched battle; as if I myself had not studied many arguments that are wholly unknown to, and untried by, the very ones

who carp at me and who believe themselves to be the noblest of philosophers.

265. Indeed, I am so far removed from this fault that I took care to limit the disputation to as few theses as I could. Had I wished (as is customary among others) to dismember the disputation and chop it into pieces, the theses would have grown to a countless number.

266. Et, ut taceam de caeteris, quis est qui nesciat unum dogma ex nongentis, quod scilicet de concilianda est Platonis Aristotelisque philosophia, potuisse me citra omnem affectatae numerositatis suspitionem in sexcenta, ne dicam plura, capita deduxisse, locos scilicet omnes in quibus dissidere alii, convenire ego illos existimo, particulatim enumerantem?

267. Sed certe (dicam enim, quamquam neque modeste neque ex ingenio meo; dicam tamen, quia dicere me invidi cogunt, cogunt obtrectatores) volui hoc meo congressu fidem facere non tam quod multa scirem, quam quod scirem quae multi nesciunt.

268. Quod ut vobis re ipsa, patres colendissimi, iam palam fiat, ut desiderium vestrum, doctores excellentissimi, quos paratos accinctosque expectare pugnam non sine magna voluptate conspicio, mea longius oratio non remoretur, quod foelix faustumque sit, quasi citante classico iam conseramus manus.

266. And, to say nothing of all of the others, who does not know that I could have subdivided a single thesis of the nine hundred (the one, for example, on the reconciliation of the philosophies of Plato and Aristotle) into, say, six hundred or more without arousing the suspicion of padding the numbers by enumerating in detail all the points on which others think they disagree and I believe they agree?

267. There can be no doubt – this I shall declare, although it is neither modest nor in keeping with my character; this I shall nonetheless declare since those who envy and speak ill of me compel me to do so – that I have

resolved through this congress of mine to demonstrate not so much that I know many things as that I know things that many do not know.[386]

268. So that this may become clear to you by the facts, most reverend fathers, and so that my oration no longer postpone the object of your desire, most excellent doctors (whom not without great delight I see ready and, girded up, spoiling for a fight), let us take up ours arms, as if to the sound of the battle trumpet, and may the outcome be fruitful and favourable.

1 Pico prepared this oration for a future debate in Rome, at which he believed his nine hundred theses would be discussed. He speaks of this congress as a senate or a council (see §154); cf. Pico's *Epistle to Lorenzo* (Bausi 1996, 115).

2 Pico was studying Arabic under the guidance of Flavius Mithridates. See his letter to Corneus (Pico 1971, *Opera omnia* 1:376–79). Cf. Pico's *Epistle to Ficino* from Fratta and his *Epistle* to Corneus of 15 October 1486.

3 Various hypotheses have been formulated about the identity of this Abdallah: Tognon (Pico 1987, 62) and Cicognani (Pico 1941, 97) identify him with 'Abd-Allāh ibn al-Muqaffa', an Arabic writer of the eighth century and a translator of Persian works into Arabic; Bausi (Pico 2003, 2) identifies him with 'Abd-Allāh ibn Salam, a Jew of Medina who converted to Islam two years before the death of Mohammed (630) after recognizing the identity of the Koran and the Torah. According to tradition, he collaborated in the writing of the Koran and was one of the four Jews who interrogated Mohammed himself on one hundred theological questions (*Doctrina Machumeti*); cf. Bibliander (1543) and Nicholas of Cusa (1971, 718, 733). Piemontese (2012) identifies him as 'Abd-Allāh b. al Tamir, head of the Christian community of Nagran (Yemen) and famous in medieval Islamic literature because of his martyrdom in 523 AD.

4 *Nihil … respondisse*: P has here some presumably Arabic letters, written in an inexpert hand, that may be deciphered as the sequence *'-l-r-'-j-w-?-l*,

perhaps naively intended to spell *al-rajul*. There then comes a blank space followed by *idest hominem respondisse*. See fig. 1.

5 “A great miracle…”; see Hermes Trismegistus, *Asclepius* 6.1–2 (*Corpus Hermeticum*, Hermes Trismegistus 1960, 2:301–2). The Hermetic writings are attributed to the Egyptian God Thot, Hermes Trismegistos in Greek, the inventor of writing, who was made to correspond to the Latin Mercury. Written in Greek and Latin, they are dated between the first and the third centuries AD and were highly valued during the period of humanism and the Renaissance, thanks to Marsilio Ficino’s translation of the most important among them, the *Poimandres*. Among these works, one also finds the *Asclepius* (Fr. Asclepius, Lat. Aesculapius, god of medicine and prophecy). Cf. *Heptaplus* 5.6; Ficino, *Theologia Platonica* 14.

6 Cf. Cicero, *De Oratore* 1.1 (Bausi 1996, 115).

7 Pico is here referring to the rich literature on the dignity of man (e.g., Bartolomeo Fazio or Giannozzo Manetti, for whom ancient Christian authors were essential); see Garin (1938) and De Lubac (1974). Pico accepts the idea of man as a *microcosmos*, gathering within himself all the elements, mediator and interpreter of the universe (see §§17 and 27, *Heptaplus* 5.7, *Picatrix* 3.5.1). This is also the central thesis of Marsilio Ficino’s *Platonic Theology*, in which the soul is placed between matter and angelic intelligences (see Kristeller 1988, 118–23), but Pico believes that man’s calling consists not in the static enjoyment of this central position but rather in the dynamism by which the human being is called to transcend the world of images and finally to become one with the Absolute, which is beyond representation.

8 Note the sequence sense, reason, intellect; these elements will reappear in the three-stage ascension according to the model of the angelic orders: thrones, cherubim, seraphim. The same sequence is in §§29ff. (and again in §§37–40), where man is meant to transcend even the angelic orders and to become one with God.

9 “Persians.” Pico is possibly thinking of a “Chaldaic” source. The *Chaldean Oracles* (a mystic writing probably of the second century and very important to Proclus) had been attributed to Zoroaster by Gemistus Plethon, Ficino’s source. See §259 and *Conclusiones* 2.8 (Farmer 1998, 486–93). We do not know, however, exactly which Chaldean texts Pico is referring to. See §129; *Persae*: *magi* P.

10 Ficino, *Theologia Platonica* 10 and also his *Epistle to Bracciolini* (Ficino 1576, 1:657); cf. *Chaldean Oracles*, frag. 6 (De Places 1971, 68).

11 See Ps. 8:4–7: “quoniam videbo caelos tuos; opera digitorum tuorum lunam et stellas quae tu fundasti / quid est homo quod memor es eius aut filius hominis quoniam visitas eum / minuisti eum paulo minus ab angelis gloria et honore coronasti eum / et constituisti eum super opera manuum tuarum” (“For I will behold thy heavens, the works of thy fingers: the moon and the stars which thou hast founded. / What is man that thou art mindful of him? Or the son of man that thou visitest him? / Thou hast made him a little less than the angels, thou hast crowned him with glory and honour: / And hast set him over the works of thy hands”).

12 Note the order angels, stars, lower creatures, repeated in reverse order in §11.

13 “Craftsman” translates *artifex*, a term echoed both in *architectus* (§10) and *opifex* (§56).

14 Note the threefold structure (to ponder, to love, to wonder), repeated in §14 (archetypes, treasure-houses, seats), §15 (higher, middle, lower orders), §16 (power, wisdom, love, with a reference to the Trinity), and once more in §18 (seat, form, talents). Bausi believes that this rhetorical device derives from the original redaction of the *Oration*, which takes three “anaphoric series” as its point of departure (Bausi 1996, 115).

15 This account of Creation depends on both biblical and Platonic sources (Bori 1996b and Bori 2000, 35ff.). (a) Biblical is the sequence of creative

acts that places Adam at the centre of a Creation already concluded, even if the way the generative processes take place is different from that of Genesis 1. Here, Creation occurs in a movement downward from on high: the area above the heavens, the animated heavenly bodies, the animals on the earth and man, with a sort of ontological degradation. (b) The idea of God speaking to His new creature is biblical, but the words spoken are quite different: instead of prohibiting accession to the tree of knowledge, there is the invitation to direct desire, knowledge, and one's whole being toward the highest possible aim. Man is taught this and not the prohibition. (c) While the image's theme is biblical, Pico's man has not been created in the image of God but is *opus indiscretae imaginis* ("a creation of an indeterminate image"). (d) The idea of sovereignty over things, which in Genesis 2 is expressed together with the faculty of naming, is also biblical. As for the Platonic source, attention must be drawn to *Timaeus* 41b (man is created as the last of beings, as a mixture of mortality and immortality), *Protagoras* 321c–d (the myth of the creation of Epimetheus, created in a state of imperfection and need), and especially the *Symposium* (interpreted by Ficino in his *De Amore*, as well as by Pico himself in his *Commento*, both of 1486). According to the well-known myth, Eros was conceived in the garden of Zeus by Poros (resource) and Penia (poverty) on the day Aphrodite was born. Eros gets his imperfect nature from this intermediate position between ignorance and knowledge, and is always seeking the latter (*Symp*. 203d–204c). Both in the *Oration* and in the *Symposium* (a) we find the praise of someone – Eros and the human creature, respectively – not for his innate dignity, based only on stereotypes and clichés, but for his potential capacity to reach the highest of ends; (b) we find someone who is in an intermediate condition, neither mortal nor immortal, neither of the earth nor of the heavens (*Symp.* 203e); (c) we find someone placed *in the midst* (*medium*, *metaxù* in the *Symposium*), capable of reaching, through the love of knowledge, the supreme reality (*Symp.* 202d); and (d) we find the priority of love, of desire, of the will as the final essence of the human being, while his intellectual nature is not at odds with but *within* his spiritual development and is supported by the dynamics of desire (and there is again here a parallel between the ascent described at the end of Diotima's intervention and the exit from the cave described in *Republic* 7).

16 Pico’s conception of *microcosmos* is active: the presence in man of the principles of every being allows him to ascend, so to speak, through all beings.

17 The term “indeterminate” translates the Latin *indiscretus*, which is influenced by the Greek ἀδιάκριτος (“undecided”). Genesis 1:26 seems to be contradicted here insofar as man has no image; however, the human being has no image precisely because he or she is called to become God, Who is beyond all representation. See §30, “caligo Patris.”

18 Human centrality (see also §21) is statically affirmed, but in relation to the dynamics of freedom.

19 This comes from the *Symposium*; see §13. Cf. Ps. 8:6.

20 God is the “ordinary” creator. *Honorariusque* om. P. *Arbitrarius*: cf. Martianus Capella 1.68. Man is “honorarius,” while God is “ordinarius” (Bausi 1996, 119); Plotinus, *Ennead*s 1.6, 9, 13 (Pico 2003, 11).

21 *liberality*: Pico, the scion of an aristocratic family, goes beyond the earthly meaning of “liberality,” one of the Aristotelian virtues discussed in *Nicomachean Ethics* 4.1, and celebrated in the Tenth Day of Boccaccio’s *Decameron*, as a sort of aristocratic sublimation of the utilitarian, mercantile logic that pervades fourteenth- and fifteenth-century Florentine civic culture. Cf. Cicero’s (2005b) *De officiis* 1.20: “beneficientia, quam eandem vel benignitatem vel liberalitatem appellari licet” (“charity, which may also be called kindness or generosity”). Cf. also Pico (1998, *De ente et uno* 8): “in veritate venerari artificis sapientiam, in bonitate redamare amantis liberalitatem” (“in truth, we can venerate the wisdom of the artisan; in goodness, we can love in return the liberality of the lover”).

22 *happiness*: Here, too, Pico goes beyond the Aristotelian-Scholastic roots of this term (see Dante, *Conv*. 4.17.8: “felicitade è operazione secondo virtude in vita perfetta” – “happiness is activity according to virtue in perfect life”), embracing a more dynamic, spiritual meaning in Platonic or

Neoplatonic terms. In book 4 of his *De dignitate et eccellentia hominis* (following Lactantius; see Garin 1972, 23ff.), Giannozzo Manetti (1396–1459) had already questioned the opinions of those, whether ancients or moderns, pagans or Christians, who emphasize the misery of human life. Manetti considers happiness to be the result of a "virtuous life" – that is, a Christian life ("…all those who accurately observe heavenly commandments will without doubt be destined to be fortunate from birth, and always happy and blessed forever," quoted by Garin 1952b, 485, my translation), emphasizing the importance of "active" versus "contemplative" life (*vita activa* vs. *vita contemplativa*). Pico, perhaps influenced by Marsilio Ficino, seems to find a new connection between the active and the contemplative aspects – knowledge as an active force – for which it may not be out of place to recall here also Virgil, *Georgics* 2.490: "Felix qui potuit rerum cognoscere causam." ("Happy is he who could know the cause of things"). See also *Heptaplus* 7 (Pico 1942, 324–26), in which Pico makes a distinction between a "natural" and a "supernatural" happiness, the latter achievable only "per gratiam," through divine grace (see also Pico 2003, introduction, 20, and n17). Cf. Pico, *Expositiones in Psalmos* 17 (Pico 1997, 154): "Hoc autem principium est universae humanae foelicitatis: ut rectae sint cogitationes nostrae et Dei spiritu agamur" ("This, however, is the source of all human happiness: that our thoughts be righteous and that we be moved by the Spirit of God").

23 *bulga*, a Latin term of Celtic origin, translated as "womb" by analogy (from Lucilius 1904–5, *Satyres* 1:26, 623; 2:230–31).

24 That is, after Lucifer's fall.

25 In the second proem of Pico's *Heptaplus* (a commentary on *Genesis*), we read: "It is a common expression in the Schools to say that man is a microcosm, whose body is a mixture of elements, including the heavenly spirit, the vegetative soul, the senses of brutes, reason, the angelic mind and the image of God" (Pico 1942, 193, my translation). Cf. Augustine, *De civitate Dei* 7.30 and 12.24.

26 In his commentary, Bausi (Pico 2003, 12–13, n29) traces this crucial passage to Iamblichus, *Protrepticus* 5, a collection of philosophical readings compiled in the third and fourth centuries (for an English translation, see Iamblichus 1988). Cf. *Asclepius* 1.5–6a (in Hermes Trismegistus 1924–36, 1:294–96). Garin suggests looking to medieval sources as well, such as John of Salisbury (*Policraticus* 8.12 [*PL* 199.756b]) and Alan of Lille. In the latter's *De Planctu Naturae* (prose 3), "the possibility for man to degenerate into a brute and regenerate himself in God are expressed in terms very similar to those used by Pico" (Garin 1972, 37); cf. Ps. 48:21. Tognon suggests a precise reference for this entire section of the *Oratio*: John Scotus Eriugena's *De divisione naturae* (3.37, *PL* 122.732b–c and 4.5, *PL* 122.754a–b). According to De Lubac, the *Oration* simply repeats the same idea that was expressed many times before in Patristic literature (De Lubac 1974, 198–99). Cf. Ficino, *Theologia Platonica* 14.3: "It [the soul] lives the life of a plant insofar as it indulges the body by fattening it up; the life of the beast insofar as it flatters the senses; the life of a man insofar as it calls upon reason to handle human affairs; the life of the heroes insofar as it investigates things in nature; the life of the demons insofar as it contemplates mathematics; the life of the angels insofar as it inquires into the mysteries divine; and the life of God insofar as it does all things for God's sake. Every man's soul in a way makes trial of all these in itself, although different souls do so in different ways, and thus humankind strives to become all things, since as a genus it lives the lives of all. Mercurius Trismegistus was struck with wonder by this and declared, 'Man is a great miracle, an animal meet to be worshipped and adored'" (Allen trans. in Ficino 2001–6, 4:240–43).

27 Among several plausible sources for this passage, both Bori (2000, 43) and Bausi (Pico 2003, 13) suggest Gregory of Nyssa (1978, *Life of Moses* 2.162–65), where we read: "When therefore Moses grew in knowledge, he declared that he had seen God in darkness, that is, that he had then come to know that what is divine is beyond all knowledge and contemplation." Cf. Exod. 19:9: "The Lord said to him: Lo, now will I come to thee in the darkness of a cloud"; Exod. 20:21: "And the people stood afar off. But Moses went to the dark cloud wherein God was"; 2 Chron. 6:1: "Then Solomon said: The Lord promised that he would dwell in a cloud." See also Deut. 4:11: "And you came to the foot of the mount, which burned even

unto heaven: and there was darkness, and a cloud and obscurity in it." Bori (2000, 42) quotes a passage from Pico's *De ente et uno* (Pico 1942, 414) in which we find an articulate definition of the paradoxical (mystical) nature of our "knowledge" of the divine, according to which "there is no darkness, no light, no error, no truth, and about the divine it is not possible [to make] either a positive or a negative statement." Cf. *Conclusiones* 1.26.5 (Farmer 1998, 338–39); *Conclusiones* 2.10.15 (Farmer 1998, 510–11); Statius, *Thebaid* 3.498; *Kaldaica Skolia*, frag. 18; Proclus, *On Cratylus* 57.25; Ps. 17:12: "et posuit tenebras latibulum suum in circuitu eius tabernaculum eius tenebrosa aqua in nubibus aeris" ("And he made darkness his covert, his pavilion round about him: dark waters in the clouds of the air"). See, too, *De ente et uno* (Pico 1942, 412–15) and Bausi (1996, 120–21). Cf. Ficino, *In Dionysium Areopagitam* (Ficino 1962, 2:1014) and §13, *Asclepius* 1.6a, 26–28 (in Hermes Trismegistus 1924–36, 1:294–96), and P, 117ff. (Pico 2003, 150–51).

28 According to Garin (followed by Pico 2003, 14n31), the most important reference for Pico's use of this word is Ficino's mention of that passage of Priscian's commentary on Theophrastus where the adjectives *chameleontean* and *Protean* are attributed to human imagination ("Imagination is both [a] Proteus and chameleon"). See Ficino (1962, 2:1825) and Garin (1985, 351). Copenhaver suggests that behind Pico's use of the term there may also be a (negative) reference to magical tradition after Pliny the Elder's *Natural History* (8.51), a text that Cosimo de' Medici had Cristoforo Landino translate into Florentine: "According to ancient sources that Pico knew, it [the chameleon] looks and behaves like a lizard, combining features of a fish, pig, viper, tortoise, and crocodile into a horrific appearance that masks its harmlessness. Is man such a monstrosity, assembled from parts of other creatures?" […] With one exception, Pico's other examples of mutability in this section of the *Oration* are as negative and ambiguous as the chameleon – transmigration of criminal souls into animals or plants and the shapeshifting of Proteus, the Old Man of the Sea who fights the noble Menelaus in the Odyssey. The only clearly positive transformation is angelic" (Copenhaver 2002a, 60). See also Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* 1100b, 5–9, on human happiness, and Ficino's translation and gloss on Priscian's comments on Theophrastus's *De Phantasia et Intellectu* (Ficino 1962, *Opera omnia* 2:1824–25).

29 Bausi (Pico 2003, 14n33) says that the identity of the Asclepius to whom Pico refers here is unknown. The adjective *Athenian* could make us think of *Asklepios* (Lat. *Aesculapius*), the legendary Greek physician, son of Apollo and Coronis and god of healing (also related to the Egyptian god Imothep). His first teacher was the wise centaur Chiron (on the cult of Asklepios in ancient Greece, see Aleshire 1991). However, contextual evidence makes it more plausible that Pico here refers again to that composite collection of texts known as the *Corpus Hermeticum* (already quoted in the opening paragraph of the *Oration*), which Marsilio Ficino started to translate from Greek into Latin in 1463; namely, to the so-called Latin *Asclepius* (Ficino's edition of the *Asclepius* was printed in 1469). Pico's text clearly echoes the Hermetic *Asclepius* (the interlocutor and disciple of Hermes Trismegistus, also understood to be a descendant of the great Asklepios, just as Hermes is a grandson of the great Egyptian god Toth).

30 For the mythological Proteus, see Homer, *Odyssey* 4.383–570, and Virgil, *Georgics* 4.387–527. However, the most immediate reference is to the Orphic Hymns quoted in Ficino's *Theologia Platonica* 11.3: "Theologia Orphica Protheum appellat essentiam tertiam, animarum rationalium sedem" ("Orphic Theology calls Proteus the third essence, and the seat of the rational soul"). (See Pico 2003, 14n33: the human soul can be compared to a Proteus because it contains the essence of all things.) De Lubac dedicates two chapters of his book on Pico (De Lubac 1974, pt. 2, "Metamorphosis") to Proteus in the works of the Church Fathers and in medieval culture.

31 The specific reference seems to be to the "Hebrew Cabalist Wisemen Whose Memory Should Always be Honoured," to whom forty-seven cabalistic *Conclusiones* are dedicated. See Farmer (1998, 344–45 and notes) for a discussion of Pico's cabalistic sources, all drawn from late medieval texts, and more specifically, according to Wirszubski (1989), from Flavius Mithridates' Latin translation of Menahem Recanati's *Commentary on the Pentateuch* (a thesis criticized by Farmer). At the Vatican Library, there are four codices (*Vaticani Hebraici* 189–91 and Chigi A VI 190) that contain Mithridates' translations with glosses by Pico. On the issue of Pico's

relationship to Jewish culture, in addition to Wirszubski, see the important contributions of Paolo Edoardo Fornaciari (1988, 107–20), Fabrizio Lelli (1994, 193–223 and 1997, 1:303–25), and Giuliano Tamani (1997, 2:491–530). See also Copenhaver (2002a, 78ff.).

32 Cabalistic and Pythagorean doctrines and calculations are a significant component of Pico's *Conclusiones* (according both to the opinions of others and to his own). For references to the mathematics of Pythagoras, namely, the *Quaternarius*, see in particular 1.25.1–14. According to Farmer, Pico draws his references to Pythagorean doctrines from late Greek sources, primarily Proclus's *Theologia Platonica* (Farmer 1998, 334). In short, a numerical (and mystical) ratio underlies the metamorphic nature of the cosmos. On Pythagoras and Florentine culture of the fifteenth century, and Pico's contemporary Giovanni Nesi (1456–1506), in particular, possibly the transcriber of the only extant manuscript of the *Oration*, P, see Celenza (2001). Cf. *Conclusiones* 2.10.28 (Farmer 1998, 514).

33 Both Garin and Tognon refer to the Ethiopic Book of Enoch 40.8 (first or second century; see Knibb 1978). Tertullian considered it part of the Holy Scriptures. There are at least three references for the Book of Enoch: the Ethiopic Book of Enoch, also known as 1 Enoch; the Slavonic Book of Enoch, also known as 2 Enoch; and the so-called Third Book of Enoch. Rather than referring to a single text, Pico more likely elaborates on a complex, and apocryphal, textual tradition. His reference could include the so-called Third Book of Enoch, presumably compiled in Babylon around the sixth century. This late apocalyptic text, which circulated also in medieval manuscripts, harkens back to the mysticism of the *Merkabah* (Scholem 1941, 66ff.). In the Jewish tradition, many legends accrete around the figure of Enoch (son of Jared, father of Methuselah, the seventh in Adamitic genealogy in the line of Seth). See Gen. 5:24: "And he walked with God, and was seen no more: because God took him," and also the apocryphal Sir. 50:14: "No one like Enoch has been created on earth, for he was taken up from the earth." Transfigured, he was taken to heaven without abandoning the human form. In the Jewish tradition, Enoch is also represented as the inventor of letters, arithmetic, and geometry, and is called "the first author."

34 The *princeps* edition has a blank space where the Hebrew word should be. Both Basel editions (1557 and 1572) have *Mal'akh ha-Sekinach*, Hebrew retroversion of the Latin *angelum divinitatis*. Following Wirszubski (1989, 232), Bausi (Pico 2003, 171–72) restores in his edition the characters found in the earlier version of the *Oration* (possibly one of two drafts Pico prepared in fall 1486 while in Umbria before moving to Rome) in the manuscript Palatino 885 of the National Library in Florence, reading them as *Metatron* (see fig. 2). A reference to *Metatron* can be found in Pico's *Commento sopra una canzona* (written in the same period as the *Oration* and the *Conclusiones*, 1486) almost in the exact terms of the *Oration*, as a synonym of transfiguration: "This is what the statement of the Cabalist wise men must mean, when they say that Enoch was transformed into *Metatron*, angel of divinity, or, in general, that any other man is transformed into an angel" (Pico 1984, 147; see also Pico 1942, 554). On the interpretation of the Enoch-Metatron transfiguration, see also *Conclusiones* 1.19.2 (according to Themistius) and 2.11.10 (cabalistic conclusions confirming the Christian religion). It is generally held that there are three possible etymological interpretations of the word *Metatron*: in addition to the Greek "Methathronius," meaning he who is next to the throne of God, one derived from *matara* ("keeper of the watch"), and one derived from *metator* ("guide"). See Scholem (1941, 66–69, and 1971–72, 1443–46). As Scholem writes, "two different traditions have been combined in the figure of Metatron. One relates to the heavenly angel who was created with the creation of the world, or even before, and makes him responsible for performing the most exalted tasks in the heavenly kingdom [derived from the angel Yaol, a sort of lesser YHWH]. […] A different tradition associates Metatron with Enoch […] he who ascended to heaven and was changed from a human being into an angel – in addition he also became the great scribe who recorded men's deeds." Interestingly enough, the fact that this second tradition associating Metatron with Enoch is "absent from the Talmud or the most important Midrashim, is evidently connected with the reluctance of the Talmudists to regard Enoch in a favourable light" (Scholem, 1971–72, 1444–45). It is perhaps not surprising that the identification occupies a prominent place in Pico's Christian Cabala. Cf. Gen. 5:21–24; Enoch 12:1–4; 3 Enoch 3:1, 16:5.

35 “I was born a male and female child, a plant, a bird and a dumb fish of the sea…” (Empedocles of Akragas, frag. 117 [Diels]; see Fitt 1962, 65–66). Cf. Pico, *Heptaplus* 4.5 (1942, 280–81): “Hence that Chaldean saying: ‘the beasts of the earth live in you’; and we learn from Plato, in the *Republic*, that we have inside us diverse species of animals; thus it is not difficult to believe (if one understands it well) the paradox of the Pythagoreans, that wicked men transform themselves into beasts.” See also Pico’s *Conclusiones* 2.3.71, where Empedocles’ doctrine is connected to the sefirot (“By strife and friendship in the soul Empedocles means nothing but the leading upwards and leading downwards in it, which I believe is proportional in the science of the *sefirot* to eternity and adornment,” trans. Farmer 1998, 421) and to Zoroaster and his Chaldean commentators (“In the same place, by the roots of the earth they can only mean the vegetative life, which conforms to the words of Empedocles, who posits transanimation even into plants,” 2.8.4, trans. Farmer 1998, 489).

36 See Sura 2:65: “And certainly you have known those among you who exceeded the limits of the Sabbath, so We said to them: Be (as) apes, despised and hated.” See also Sura 5:60, 7:166. We know that Pico, who was studying Hebrew and Arabic with the help of Flavius Mithridates, borrowed a Latin translation of the Koran from Marsilio Ficino (Pico 2003, 17n36).

37 According to Bausi (Pico 2003, 17n37), this passage shows that Pico does not adhere to the doctrine of metempsychosis (or transmigration of the soul) and agrees with Ficino (*Theol. Pl.* 17.4) on a moral and allegorical interpretation of the transformations of which Empedocles and other ancient authors speak.

38 The Latin text (*humi serpentem hominem*) plays on a popular etymology for human, derived from *humus* (man shaped out of earth), already used by G. Manetti in his own *De dignitate*. There are many medieval sources for this passage; see Isidore of Seville’s *Etymologies* 11.1.4 and Pico’s own commentary on Genesis (Pico, 1942, 270, my translation): “Because he was made of earth, as Moses writes, he was called man.”

39 Homer, *Odyssey* 1.55–57 (Homer 1990, 5). It was widely taken that Ulysses is the allegory of the "good (moral) man" and that Calypso, the enchantress, binds him with false imaginations.

40 For this paragraph, possible sources are Seneca, *Epistles* 41.4–5, and Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* 7.1 (1145a), echoed by Dante's *Convivio* 3.7.6.

41 See, for example, Gen. 6:12 ("God had seen that the earth was corrupted, for all flesh had corrupted its way upon the earth"); Num. 27:16; Deut. 5:26; Luke 3:6; John 3:6 and 17:2; 1 Cor. 15:39; 1 Peter 24.

42 It is difficult to know which "Persian" source Pico has in mind.

43 The Hebrew characters here derive from Wirszubski's transliteration of the phrase in the Palatino manuscript, which is reproduced in fig. 3. (See Mithridates 1963, 38, and Wirszubski 1989, 241.) Pico claims he possessed the *Chaldean Oracles* (i.e., books containing the oracles of "Ezre, Zoroastris and the Melchiar of the Magi") in a letter to Ficino (fall 1486, Ficino 1937, 2:272–73). According to Farmer (1998, 486–87), this became the source of a conviction among Renaissance editors of the *Oracles* – such as, for example, Francesco Patrizi – that Pico indeed possessed the original, integral texts from which the extant and incomplete Greek collections made by Psellus (eleventh century) and Pletho (fifteenth century) were drawn (fragments from Plotinus, Proclus, and others). Ficino himself had translated and provided commentary on Pletho's collection. There is no trace of it (attributed to Chaldean sources) in the *Conclusiones*. According to Bausi (Pico 2003, 172–73), who follows both Wirszubski and Marchignoli (in Bori 2000, 98, 106), the rather uncertain quotation is in a composite language, a mixture of Aramaic and Hebrew, written in an Ethiopic script, that Pico's "consultant," Flavius Mithridates, presented to his patron as Chaldean. See §§130–35. The Heinrich Petri editions present not these words but a Latin paraphrase translated back into Hebrew (see Pico 2003, 172).

44 Bausi (Pico 2003, 20n44) notes how the Latin word here translated as "inconstant" (*desultorius*) is used by Varro and Apuleius in reference to riders (*desultores*) who jumped like acrobats from one horse to another. More interestingly perhaps (also according to Bausi), Poliziano uses the same adjective for Venus (*desultoria Venus*) in *Nutricia* 106–7, speaking of the "free love" of primitive men before the institution of marriage.

45 The reference is to Ps. 81:6–7: "I have said: You are gods and all of you the sons of the most High. / But you like men shall die: and shall fall like one of the princes." These are words spoken by God to the angels, condemned for their sins. Pico applies them to men in order to incite them to ascend from their intermediate (and shapeless) station toward a higher, angelic form, the theme of the next section of the *Oration*. Cf. Copenhaver (2002a, 61).

46 Wallis, Miller, and Carmichael mistakenly translate "caelestia *contemnamus*" as "let us struggle toward the heavenly." I prefer to be consistent with the letter of the text, sticking to the classical meaning of the verb *contemnare* (used by Cicero and others) and translating *caelestia* as "celestial" rather than "heavenly." Pico's reference might be to the astronomical-astrological knowledge of the heavens. In any case, it is consistent with what he writes in §40, where he suggests a higher stage of contemplation beyond the earthly and the celestial (see also my reference to the rubbed out word "demon" in the introduction).

47 This image is developed further in §94 and §132.

48 On angelic hierarchies, see the commentary to the next section.

49 This is the first time the word "dignity" appears in the text of the *Oration*. It also appears written in the margins of the Bolognese incunabulum of 1496 (visible online on the site of the Pico Project) and will migrate later into the title (see Michael Papio's introduction to this volume). In addition to Garin (1938, 102–46), Bori (2000, 41) lists a number of canonical and extracanonical sources most likely known to Pico, including

a text by Pope Leo the Great, that have become part of the Christmas service: “Agnosce, o christiane, dignitatem tuam …” (Acknowledge, o Christian, your dignity; and espousing divine nature, do not regress to the old filth, with a degenerate conversation”). See also Buck (1997, 1:5). The dignity and nature of man is the eighth point in Pico’s twelve *Spiritualis pugnae arma* (“Arms of the spiritual struggle”), included in his *Twelve Rules for the Spiritual Struggle*. Cf. Manetti’s *De dignitate et excellentia hominis* (1532, fol. 163): “…quod neque angelis neque ulli aliae creaturae, nisi homini dumtaxat, ad admirabilem quandam humanae naturae dignitatem et ad incredibilem quoque eius ipsius excellentiam, datum, concessum et attributum esse novimus” (“…we acknowledge what neither pertains to the angel nor to any other creature, if not to man, and it is given, allowed and attributed to the admirable dignity of human nature and his own incredible excellence”).

50 Cf. Pico’s first exposition on Ps. 17:12 (Raspanti in Pico 1997, 149).

51 As in Calcidius’s commentary on Plato’s *Timaeus*, *opifex* (from δημιουργός; e.g., *Tim*. 28c) may be taken as God or the Creator. *Opificium*, then, comes to mean “creation” or “world.” See Pico’s *Heptaplus* (e.g., 1.1.3, 1.5.2, and 6.proem).

52 In accordance with the scheme set out by Pseudo-Dionysius (see §70 of the *Oration*) and confirmed by St. Thomas (*Summa Theologiae* 1.108, art. 6) and St. Gregory (*In evang*. II hom. 34), Pico represents here the three divisions of the highest order of angels: the seraphim, the cherubim, and the thrones. The fact that Pico specifically calls the cherubim contemplators does not, of course, mean that the seraphim and thrones are not. Man’s task is the emulation of the highest angels, and dialectics is the necessary intermediate stage in this mystic process (Bori 1996b, 557). See *Conclusiones* 1.6.7, 1.28.2. It has been suggested (Farmer 1998, 346–51) that Pico consciously overlaid the cabalistic sefirot on the celestial hierarchy elucidated by Pseudo-Dionysius. In this arrangement, as it applies here, each of these three types of angels is associated with a specific sefirah: the seraphim with Hesed (love); the thrones with Din (judgment);

the cherubim with Binah (intelligence). See Pseudo-Dionysius, *Celestial Hierarchy* 205b–209a.

53 Yahweh flies through the Heavens mounted on a cherub (2 Sam. 22:11; Ps. 17:11).

54 This unusual phrase, in which God "broods," is glossed by Pico himself in *Heptaplus* 2.2: "Above this [i.e., the crystalline heaven of the upper waters] was borne or, as Hebrew wisdom has it and as Ephraim the Syrian translates it, 'brooded,' the Spirit of the Lord; that is, the closely adhering spiritual Olympus, the seat of the Spirits of the Lord, warmed it with its warmth-giving light" (Pico 1998). See also *Heptaplus* 1.2 and Pico's *Commento* 1.10. Interestingly, the gloss of St. Ephrem in question (*Com. on Genesis* 1.7) explicitly states that it was a normal wind and not the Spirit of the Lord (Hebrew רוח, *ruah*) that hovered or brooded above the waters (Kronholm 1978, 43–44). Jerome registers the Hebrew term mentioned there as מרחפת, which he transcribes as *merefeth* (*Liber Hebraicarum quaestionum in Genesim PL* 23.937c). Some manuscripts, however, have the apparently more accurate *merahefeth* or *merahaefeth*. For the implications of this line of interpretation, see Hayward's commentary on Jerome's *Hebrew Questions on Genesis* (in Jerome 1995, 103–5) (see also 2 Sam. 22:11; Pss. 18:11, 104:3; Hos. 4:19; Augustine, *Confessions* 13.9, *De Genesi ad litteram* 1.18; Abelard, *Sic et non* 23; Basil, *Homilia II in Hexaëron*). Later in the *Heptaplus* (6.2 and 6.5), Pico returns to this same image, citing James 1:17. See also: Pss. 17:11, 23:2; Gen. 1:2; Jer. 4:23.

55 As Bausi rightly notes, most commentators direct the reader to Job 38:7, but a more likely source is actually Ps. 148:4. Cf. *Conclusiones* 1.28.24, 2.11.67; Farmer (1998, 549 and passim). On early-morning prayer, see *Conclusiones* 1.28.37.

56 Cf. 1 Cor. 12:8–14; Augustine, *De trinitate* 9.3.

57 On loving the unknown, see Augustine, *De trinitate* 10.1.3, and Rabanus Maurus's *Commentary on Matthew* 4.13.5. Cf. John 10:30, 17:11,

21–22; Deut. 29:29; Farmer (1998, 226, 252).

58 Exod. 24:15–18. After his ascent to the mountain to make atonement for his people's sins (Exod. 32:30ff.), Moses returned to his people in the Sinai Wilderness and revealed to them what he had learned in direct communion with God: the Law tablets (Exod. 34:1–4), the granting of Israel's covenant (Exod. 34:10ff.), the establishment of the Feast of the Unleavened Bread (Exod. 34:18), the revelation of the Sabbath (Exod. 35:1ff.), and the organization of the tabernacle (Exod. 35–38). For Moses as a contemplator, see Philo, *Life of Moses* 2.68–69, and Pseudo-Dionysius, *Mystical Theology* 1001a.

59 These three classes of angels are known as the "first hierarchy," as they are closest to God. The necessity of the middle level in joining the upper and the lower is addressed in the *Heptaplus* (6.7) in imagery consonant with that employed here. Cf. Pico's *Exposition* (230–38) on Psalm 50 (in Pico 1997, 246) and the *Heptaplus*'s second proem.

60 Cf. Macrobius, *On the Dream of Scipio* 1.6.11, and Pico's *Heptaplus* 6.6. The "Prime Minds" are the angels; the "Order of Pallas" is a phrase referring to the cherubim, insofar as they preside over the contemplators (Pico 2003, 26–27).

61 Bausi (1996, 126) maintains that the language here is drawn directly from Ermolao Barbaro (1943, 1:15), but see also Quintilian's *Institutiones* 6.3.111 and Seneca's *Controversiae* 2.13.

62 Rom. 8:5; Phil. 3:19; Col. 3:2. Cf. *Heptaplus* (proem to 7): "si nixum propria fortitudine nihil supra se ipsum potest assurgere (alioquin se ipso esset validius), utique nihil nitens per se ipsum ad felicitatem maius aliquid vel perfectius sua natura assequi poterit" ("since nothing can rise above itself by relying on its own strength [otherwise it would be stronger than itself], so nothing relying on itself can attain a felicity any greater or more perfect than its own nature" (Pico 1998).

63 Acts 9:15. See also *Commento* 2.9; Panofsky (1962, 140–41).

64 *Celestial Hierarchy* 165b–c, 205c–209d. This Dionysius was, of course, thought to be the homonymous follower of Paul of Acts 17:34. See also *Heptaplus* 3.3 and Pseudo-Dionysius's *Divine Names* 821b–d. The mystic three-stage path, or *triplex via*, was often articulated as *purgatio-illuminatio-unitio* (or *perfectio*).

65 *Ecclesiastical Hierarchy* 537a–c.

66 Augustine, among several others, regularly defines the cherub as *plenitudo scientiae* ("the fullness of knowledge"). See, for example, his sermon on Psalm 97, in which he makes a connection between the fullness of knowledge, love, and God's throne. Pico may have also been thinking of Richard of St. Victor's *De arca mystica*: "Certe cherubin *plenitudo scientiae* dicitur, et sub talis vocabuli praesagio magnum quiddam secretioris scientiae proponere, vel polliceri videtur" ("Certainly the word 'cherub' means 'fullness of knowledge,' and under the indication of this word it seems that a kind of great thing of hidden knowledge is being proposed and promised," Zinn, trans., in Richard of St. Victor 1979, 259). See also Gregory, *Moralia in Job* 17.27 (*PL* 76.29a); Isidore of Seville, *Mysticorum expositiones sacramentorum*, "On Genesis" 5.13–14 and "On Exodus" 46.1 (*PL* 83.222c and 311b–c). Pico's use of the phrase in the *Oration* additionally evokes Jerome's famous notion of *scientia secretorum*, which seems particularly appropriate to his discussion of the mysteries (see §104).

67 Richard of St. Victor's *De duodecim patriarchis* is based on the notion that Jacob was the father of twelve sons: the successive stages of the contemplator's quest for mystical enlightenment. The recurring topos of Jacob's image engraved in the throne of God comes from the Aggadic tradition. See Wolfson 1995, 1–62. Jacob, like Moses, was considered a prototype of effective enlightenment. "Those of our own" refers to the scholars of the Latin tradition (see §186).

68 Jacob saw God here on Earth only during a dream (Gen. 28:11–17); in Heaven, however, the vision of God is attainable in a waking state. Cf. *Heptaplus* 3.4, *Commento* (notes to fourth stanza), and St. Hilary's *Tractatus super psalmos* (*PL* 9.657b). This paradox of Jacob's heightened powers of perception during "sleep" was used by Richard of St. Victor as a model of ascetic contemplation, of the time when the body seems to sleep but the mind is acutely aware (*De exterminatione* 3.16).

69 Genesis 28:12–13; *Commento* (notes to sixth stanza); Philo, *De somniis* 1.2ff.; Iamblichus, *Protrepticus* 1 (41.11–24 in Iamblichus 1989). Interestingly, Pico's depiction of the relatively harmonious comings and goings of the angels on the ladder is a rather joyous contradiction of the typical iconography of the ladder to God. See Katzenellenbogen (1964, 22–26).

70 See Plato, *Phaedo* 67b (Pico 2003, 31). See also Num. 4:15: "[…] non tangant vasa sanctuarii ne moriantur…" ("and they shall not touch the vessels of the sanctuary, lest they die"); 2 Kings 6:6–7: "extendit manum Oza ad arcam Dei et tenuit eam quoniam calcitrabant boves iratusque est indignatione Dominus contra Ozam et percussit eum super temeritate qui mortuus est tibi iuxta arcam Dei" ("Oza put forth his hand to the ark of God, and took hold of it: because the oxen kicked and made it lean aside. And the indignation of the Lord was enkindled against Oza, and he struck him for his rashness: and he died there before the ark of God").

71 The conception here of aspects of the soul as a hindrance to the attainment of spiritual and philosophical purity (§§78–80) owes much to Plato's *Phaedo* (64c–67b), in which mastery of physical appetite is the cornerstone of moral rectitude.

72 Cf. Ps. 17:25. Cf. Arnobius Afer, *Disputationum adversus gentes libri VII* 2.9; Rabanus Maurus, *Commentaria in libros II paralipomenon* 2.28. See also Bausi (1996, 127).

73 The phrase *sub pulvere* (“within the dust”) often means “furtively” (e.g., Gregory, *Mor*. 32.10) but here conveys precisely the opposite meaning: “in the public arena” or “publicly.” See, for example, Cicero, *De legibus* 3.6.14.

74 Job 40:16; Isidore, *Sententiarum libri tres* 2.39, “De fornicatione” (*PL* 83.641a). Cf. Pico (1998, *De ente et uno* 10): “Unitatis pacem turbat ambitio et sibi haerentem animum extra se rapit et in diversa quasi lacerum trahit atque discerpit” (“Ambition disturbs the peace of unity and wrenches the soul that clings to it out of itself, and drags and tears the soul in pieces as if wounded”).

75 “By the neck.” Despite some commentators’ ingenious source hunting, this was not a particularly uncommon expression. See, however, Garin’s edition of the *Oration*, in which he observes that this particular usage here may echo Asclepius (Pico 1942), an opinion adopted by Copenhaver (2002a, 67–68) and Hermes Trismegistus (1992, 74).

76 Psalm 23:3–4: “quis ascendet in montem Domini et quis stabit in loco sancto eius [?] innocens manibus et mundo corde qui non exaltavit frustra animam suam” (“Who shall ascend into the mountain of the Lord: or who shall stand in his holy place? The innocent in hands, and clean of heart, who hath not taken his soul in vain”). Cf. Aeneas to Anchises (Virgil 1986, *Aen*. 2.717ff.): “Tu, genitor, cape sacra manu patriosque Penatis; / me, bello e tanto digressum et caede recenti, / attrectare nefas, donec me flumine vivo / abluero” (“Father, do thou take in thy hand the sacred things and our country’s household gods; for me, fresh from such a conflict and recent carnage, it were sin to handle them, until I have washed me in a running stream.”

77 This could be a reference to the metaphor of eternal happiness as circular movement. See *Heptaplus* (proem to 7): “Circular motion, through which a body is carried around to the point from which it started, is the most express image of the true felicity, through which a creature returns to the beginning from which it proceeded” (Pico 1998). This passage may be inspired principally by al-Batalyawsi. See Idel (2005, *Ascensions* 183–87).

78 A probable source for these similes is Plutarch's *On Isis and Osiris* 18. After Osiris dies, Typhon (who is identified as being akin to the Titans in 49 and whom Pico identifies with Satan in *Conclusiones* 2.10.13) comes upon his corpse and cuts it into pieces. Isis afterward collects almost all of the body parts and, with the help of her son Horus (first identified with Apollo in Herodotus 2.144), conquers Typhon. As a result of this conflict, Osiris comes to be regarded as the god of the dead but also of renewed life through Horus (who is, like Apollo, associated with the sun). See also Pico's *Commento* 2.8.

79 "To be made perfect" is a phrase that refers to "perfection" in its mystical sense. See §70 and note 64.

80 It actually was not Job but Jeremiah who entered into a pact with God before his birth (see Jer. 1:5). See also, however, Job 31:18.

81 Daniel 7:10.

82 Job 25:2; Dan. 7:10; Gen. 1:2; *Heptaplus* 3.6. Cf. *Conclusiones* 1.28.24 (Farmer 1998, 355) and Mithridates (2005, 151).

83 Pseudo-Dionysius, *Celestial Hierarchy* 209a–b. Cf. *Conclusiones* 2.5.3.

84 Empedocles, frag. 17 (Diels and Kranz 1951–52). This is a reference to the "Cosmic Cycle" of Empedocles, according to which two fundamental cosmic forces are locked in an eternal struggle. Love (φιλία) strives to attract and combine, while Strife (νεῖκος) seeks to repel and separate. Cf. Aristotle, *Met*. 985a20–30; Plutarch, *On Isis and Osirus* 48. By comparing *Conclusiones* 2.3.71 and 2.11.66, we see that the former is akin to the seventh sefirah and the latter to the eighth (i.e., what moves toward superior things and what toward inferior). See Farmer (1998, 421, 549).

85 Empedocles, frag. 115, 13–14 (Diels and Kranz 1951–52). Cf. *Conclusiones* 2.3.71.

86 Cf. Lucan, *Pharsalia* 1.1 (Cassirer, Kristeller, and Randall in Pico 1948, 231). *Plusquam civilia bella* ("more than civil wars") are those waged not only among citizens but even members of a single family. See Isidore of Seville (*Etym*. 18.1) and Rabanus Maurus (*De universo* 20.1). Cf. Augustine, *De doctrina christiana* 4.139.

87 The phrase "our man" in 2 Cor. 4:16 is explained as the "exterior self" (Pico 2003, 38). Bonaventure (1882–1902, 2:587) glosses the expression as the body, as opposed to the "interior self," which is the "rational spirit" or mind.

88 Pico elaborates on the metaphor of man's interior "manifold beast" in *Heptaplus* 4.5–7, citing Plato's statements in the *Republic* (588c–92b) that our secret desires can be compared to various beasts that dwell within us. Cf. Eusebius, *Praeparatio evangelica* 12.46. Bori explains that there is an allusion here to the labours of Hercules (Bori 2000, 77) and that the phrase "manifold beast" refers to the hydra (sensuality) and the "lion" refers to the Nemean lion (wrath). Cf. Bausi (Pico 2003, 39).

89 To understand this simile of the "icta porca" (stuck sow), we must look to Virgil, who, in the eighth book of the *Aeneid*, recounts the peace made between Romulus and Tatius over the sacrificed sow (*Aen.* 8.639–41). This passage is incorporated by Pico in Christian terms and brought in here as the symbol of a ratified peace. See also the last verse of Pico's *Carmen latinum* 7.

90 *Contentio* ("strife") is perhaps the Latin translation of νεῖκος but could refer just as well to Homer's use of ἔρις, related to Eris, the goddess of discord. The comparison between Heraclitus and Homer is found in Aristotle (*Eudem*. *Eth*. 1235a25), Plutarch (*De Iside et Osiride* 48), and others. See Heraclitus, frags. 10, 53 (in which the etymon is πόλεμος [Pico 2003, 40]), and 80 (Diels and Kranz 1951–52); Homer, *Iliad* 18.107. Cf. *Commento* 2.8 and the first *Epistle* to Gianfrancesco.

91 Cf. Philo, *On the Cherubim* 37.

92 Matthew 11:28; John 14:27; Jer. 6:16.

93 In other words, we who are of this world will fly into the embrace of Theology. See *Conclusiones* 2.5.9. Cf. *De ente et uno* 10; Ps. 54:7; *Commento* (notes to stanza I). See also §109. Although Pico casts the *beatissima mater* ("most blessed Mother") specifically as Theology, his phrase is constructed in such a way as to bring to mind also the Virgin and the Dove of Song of Songs 6:8 as well as the female personification of knowledge or philosophy at large (cf. Boethius, *Consolation of Philosophy* 4. prose 1, metre 1). This feminine personification likewise suggests Shekhinah or the Matronita. A relationship between the medieval Marian tradition and the Shekhinah of the *Zohar* is proposed by Green (94–97).

94 This phrase echoes quite closely the important proem of the *Heptaplus*'s (Pico 1998) third book, in which we read: "volabo insuper caelestem regionem, ubi vera est quies, vera pax, vera tranquillitas, pax utique quam hic visibilis et corporeus dare non potest" ("I shall fly above the heavenly region to that of true repose, peace, and tranquility, especially that peace which this visible and corporeal world cannot give").

95 On the unity of the intellect, see Farmer (1998, 112–14). See also *Conclusiones* 1.7.3, 1.20.7, 2.4.24–25; Farmer (1998, 107–8). It should be noted that the yearning for peace is, in effect, also the desire for truth (cf. Mithridates 2005, 158), for without peace there is no union (whether *unitio* or *henosis*), and without truth there is no understanding of the Godhead (or the One). For Pico, these are all logical points of ontological – and philosophical – convergence. See *De ente et uno* 10 (Pico 1998): "Pat[er …] ipsa unitas, ipsa veritas, ipsa bonitas est. […] Evolemus ad Patrem ubi pax unifica, ubi lux verissima, voluptas optima" ("The Father […] is unity itself, truth itself, goodness itself. […] Let us fly to the Father where there is unifying peace, truest light, best pleasure").

96 See Iamblichus, *De vita Pythagorica* 33.229–33. See also Pico's *Epist.* 20.5.

97 Cf. Luke 2:13–14 and *Heptaplus* 7.4.

98 Cf. Matt. 10:12–13: “Intrantes autem in domum salutate eam et siquidem fuerit domus digna veniat pax vestra super eam” (“And when you come into the house, salute it, saying: Peace be to this house”); Luke 10:5–6; John 14:23.

99 As will soon become apparent, the feminine pronouns in this section and the next refer to the soul, *anima*, which is a feminine noun in Latin.

100 Psalm 23:10. Cf. *Conclusiones* 1.6.3.

101 See Macarius’s first homily (3–4), in which he explains the allegories of Ezekiel’s vision, comprehensible only if one takes it anagogically to represent the advent of Christ (the hand that appears beneath the cherub’s wings), Who oversees the perfection of the human soul and its preparation to become God’s throne. For Proclus’s tripartite path to theology as an analogue to Pseudo-Dionysius’s triple way, see Bori (2000, 51ff.). Despite man’s apparent ability to raise himself up, the self-preparatory elements of the soul’s attainment of union with God should not be seen as existing outside the need for God’s grace (see Dulles 1941, 121–25). Cf. John 14:23; Ps. 23:7–8.

102 Cf. *Conclusiones* 1.28.3; Prov. 20:28.

103 Psalm 44:10–11: “Adstetit regina a dextris tuis in vestitu deaurato circumdata varietate / audi filia et vide et inclina aurem tuam et obliviscere populum tuum et domum patris tui” (“The queen stood on thy right hand, in gilded clothing; surrounded with variety. / Hearken, O daughter, and see, and incline thy ear: and forget thy people and thy father’s house”). According to the most common interpretations of these verses, the bride here represents the emergence of a single church from a “variety” of languages and customs (cf. Jerome *Ep*. 65.14–15 [*PL* 22.633]; Augustine, *Enarrationes in psalmos* 44.24–25 [*PL* 36.510]). Pico recasts the image as

the illumination of the single soul through a variety of "sciences," or schools of thought.

104 Cf. Isa. 49:18, 61:10; Jer. 2:32; John 3:29; Rev. 19:7–8, 21:2. This eroticization of the union between the soul and God clearly owes much in tone to the Song of Songs. Cf. also Hos. 2:19–20. This union is of a very personal nature inasmuch as this intimate "marriage" represents the contemplative's ultimate goal. See Rabanus Maurus, *Commentary on Ezekiel* 15.40; Ps. 44:11–12; Isa. 49:18; Gen. 24:7. The allegorical allusions belong both to the cabalistic tradition of *hieros gamos* (e.g., Shekhinah's coupling with Binah) and to the Christian mystical vision of the soul's union with the Godhead (e.g., Bernard of Clairvaux's *Sermones in Epiphania* 2.2–3 [*PL* 183.158–59]). See also Richard of St. Victor's *De arca mystica* 3.13–16.

105 Cf. *Conclusiones* 1.17.3–5; Ps. 115:15.

106 That "plenitude of life" known as death is explained more clearly by Pico in *De ente et uno* 5. Citing Paul (1 Cor. 15:31; Rom. 7:24) and Seneca (*Ep*. 102 and 120), Pico casts our worldly life as death itself inasmuch as it is simply the soul's temporary vivification of the body, not a state of existence that is characteristic of the essence of the soul. The soul's "life" is being and, given that the study of philosophy is also the contemplation of being, can in this way be seen to exemplify the object of the philosopher's endeavour. Cf. the last sentence of *De ente et uno* and *Phaedo* 82b–84b. In the *Commento* (notes to stanza 4), Pico explains that the cabalists believed many patriarchs had died as a result of intellectual rapture, represented allegorically in the kiss. Having been so completely uplifted, they were able to abandon their bodies (*Conclusiones* 2.8.7, 2.11.13). See also Macrobius, *In somnium Scipionis* 1.12.17; Rom. 14:7–8; Col. 2:11–13; Plato, *Phaedo* 60d ff. (Pico 1987, 20), 81a (Cassirer, Kristeller, and Randall in Pico 1948, 232).

107 See Origen's first homily on Genesis: "Therefore, by participation in that celestial water which is said to be above the heavens, each of the faithful becomes heavenly, that is, when he applies his mind to lofty and

exalted things, thinking nothing about the earth but totally about heavenly things" (Origen 1982, 50). This notion is not far from those expressed in §§55–56 and indeed corresponds to Pico's explanation of the "deathless fountain" in the *Commento* (notes to stanza 4). Cf. *Conclusiones* 2.9.6. The image of heavenly nectar in this context goes back to Plato's discussion of the angelic charioteer who, after guiding the soul to heaven, refreshes his horses with ambrosia and nectar (*Phaedrus* 243e–257a). Cf. Macrobius, *In somnium Scipionis* 1.12.11. Nectar, according to Proclus, corresponds to the Infinite (cf. *Conclusiones* 1.24.54; Farmer 1998, 333). Ficino was especially intrigued by this mythical "hymn," of which he wrote several times and which indeed occupies nearly all of his commentary on the *Phaedrus*. In a letter sent to Giovanni Cavalcanti (known as the *De raptu Pauli ad tertium coelum* [Ficino 1576, 1:697ff.]), Ficino uses Plato's charioteer as a stylistic model for Paul's vision of heaven (cf. 2 Cor. 12:2–4 and §70). The motif is revisited, complete with mention of the divine foods, in two other works: in *De voluptate*, Ficino explains that ambrosia represents contemplation and nectar the joy of being near to God; in *De amore* (7.14), ambrosia and nectar are symbolic of the wondrous vision of heaven. These two interpretations come together in his commentary on the *Philebus* (chap. 34) and in the *Theologia Platonica* (18.8). These various ideas on the meaning of heavenly nectar appear frequently in many of Ficino's letters. See Allen (1981, 220 and passim). Pico probably begins with this Platonic notion of the presence of nectar in heaven but then, relying on Plotinus's interpretation (*Enneads* 3.5.9) of a passage in Plato's *Symposium* (203b–c), adds the reference to intoxication, an allusion in the case of Plotinus to the way in which knowledge is passed down from higher to lower levels. See also Pico's *Commento* (2.14a, notes to stanza 3 and notes to stanza 4, in which he refers to Maimonides' *Guide for the Perplexed* 2.12) and *Conclusiones* 2.10.24, 2.11.17; cf. §108. For the cherub as the supercelestial charioteer who guides the soul in an orderly fashion away from discord, see Philo, *On the Cherubim* 23–24.

108 "Solitude of the body" is a phrase that was sometimes associated with Job 39:6 (Gregory, *Moralia in Job* 30.16). See also Gerhoh of Reichersberg's *Commentaria vetustissima et profundissima super Canticum Canticorum* 3.3 (*PL* 195.1129c–d).

109 Cf. Exod. 19:22–23; Lev. 16:23–24. The allegory of the tabernacle as an end is traditional. See Gregory of Nyssa's *Life of Moses* 177–78. Though hardly as enthusiastic about pagan philosophers, Richard of St. Victor (both in his *De arca mystica* and the *Nonnullae allegoriae tabernaculi foederis*) likewise glosses the various grades of access to the tabernacle as linear phases of epistemological progress that culminate in the grace of understanding through the contemplation of divine *invisibilia*. For the purification of the priests, see Philo's *Life of Moses* 2.74 and 138ff.; Clement of Alexandria's *Stromateis* 5.6; Jerome's *Commentary on Ezekiel*, chap. 3; and Pico's first exposition on Ps. 17:12 (Pico 1997, 149). Thessaly, long considered a hotbed of magicians, fits in nicely with the concept of the intelligent but misguided soul.

110 The menorah appears also in the eighth tale of Flavius Mithridates' translation, made for Pico, of *The Great Parchment*. Its modern editor, Giulio Busi, explains: "In various passages, [the author] expresses the theoretical principle of the correspondence between a particular *sefirah* and the whole. He says for instance that 'the holy Temple below is arranged according to the region of the holy temple above,' thus signifying that *malkut* (the lower Sanctuary) reproduces the structure of the whole emanation (the upper Sanctuary). Such a perfect mirroring is however possible only when the priest takes his dirty 'clothes […] away [and …] puts clean linen over his head.' That is when the evil forces are driven away and *yesod* (the holy priest) is connected purely with *malkut*. Such a mystical purity makes it possible to ascend through meditation to the outermost source of light" (Mithridates 2004, 38).

111 Cf. Rabanus Maurus's *Commentary on Ezekiel* 42.17; Bausi (1996, 37).

112 The meaning of §§98–102 relies upon several Old Testament passages related to temples and the duties of priests. Most scholars attribute the wondrous images of §101 to the descriptions of the Ark of the Covenant (Exod. 25–26). See also Exod. 27:21; Lev. 4:6, 24:3; *Heptaplus* (second proem); and *Conclusiones* 1.2.22. To be sure, the phrase *pellicea elementa* ("skin coverings") is difficult to understand if not in reference to the furs

placed over the ark's exterior (cf. Exod. 26:7, 14, 36:19, and 39:33; see Pico 1948, 233). The skins could be Christological symbols and/or representative of the Fall and Redemption; cf. *Conclusiones* 2.8.8–9 and Farmer (1998, 489–90). Similarly, the seven-part candelabra could well be inspired by the *septem lucernas* ("seven lights") of Exod. 25:37–39 and the multicoloured decorations of the supercelestial world by the various blues, scarlets, purples, and golds of the tabernacle's curtains (Exod. 26:1–6).

113 Such a forthright assertion recalls Eriugena's famous phrase "Nemo intrat in caelum nisi per philosophiam" ("No one enters heaven except through philosophy," in Eriugena 1939, 64).

114 Pico was not the only one to use the term "mystery" as applied to Moses's teachings. Cf., for example, Ficino's *In Phaedrum* (Ficino 1576, 1363): "Tum vero interea mirabile nota mysterium mosayco mysterio simile" ("Meanwhile, take note of this marvelous mystery, which resembles the Mosaic mystery," trans. Allen 1981, 74–75). For an antecedent, see Philo, *On the Cherubim* 48–49. See also Eriugena, *Periphyseon* 2.22 (*PL* 122.564a–b).

115 On the theology of the ancients, or *prisca theologia* (a notion that was taken from Gemistus Pletho), see Ficino's *Argumentum* set before his translation of the *Pimander* (Ficino 1576, 1836): "There is, therefore, a theology of the ancients (*prisca theologia*) […] which has its origins in Mercury and culminates in the divine Plato." For an alternative thread, which begins with Zoroaster, see *Theologia Platonica* 17.1 (Ficino 1576, 386). For the different genealogies, see Walker (1956). For a general overview, see Walker (1972); see also M. J. B. Allen, "Golden Wits, Zoroaster and the Revival of Platon" in Allen (1998). Pico's trust in the *prisca theologia* will turn into disillusionment and then finally disappear in his *Disputationes*; see Valcke (1989, 192), cited in Bausi (1996, 110n19).

116 The exclamation "by Hercules!" (akin to "by Jove!") was not uncommon, but see Bausi (Pico 2003, 167–68) for its appearance in Gianfrancesco's editorial work.

117 On dialectics seen as an expiatory art, see Plato, *Sophist* 230c–d.

118 Ancient mystery cults (e.g., the Eleusinian) often required novices to progress through a series of stages before beholding in person the contents of the sacred κίστη and attaining *epopteia* (see §§104 and 106). The creation of an analogy between the path of philosophy and that of the mysteries – the first steps of which consist in purification and initiation – is typical of Neoplatonism but is already present in Plato's *Phaedo* 69b–d: "… but truth is in fact a purification from all these things, and self-restraint and justice and courage and wisdom itself are a kind of purification. And I fancy that these men who established the mysteries were not unenlightened, but in reality had a hidden meaning when they said long ago that whoever goes uninitiated and unsanctified to the other world will lie in the mire, but he who arrives there initiated and purified will dwell with the gods. For as they say in the mysteries, 'the thyrsus-bearers are many, but the mystics are few'; and these mystics are, I believe, those who have been true philosophers" (Plato 1990). A.-J. Festugière has suggested that the *mystères cultuels* have been replaced through the *mystères littéraires* (cf. Diès 1927). Regarding the issue of the "language of mysteries" in a Platonic context, refer to Wind's introduction (Wind 1968).

119 Cf. Plato, *Symposium* 210a; Plutarch, *On Isis and Osiris* 77 (382d).

120 See Plato, *Phaedo* 69c.

121 See Plato, *Phaedrus* 247e, in Ficino's translation: "Cum autem redierit, auriga ad praesepe sistens equos obicit illis ambrosiam, et post ipsam nectar potandum" ("On his arrival, the charioteer stops the horses at the stable and offers them ambrosia and nectar also to drink," Allen trans. in Allen 1981, 220). See also §98.

122 Plato's most significant passage may be found in *Phaedrus* 265b: "And we made four divisions of the divine madness, ascribing them to four gods, saying that prophecy was inspired by Apollo, the mystic madness by Dionysos, the poetic by the Muses, and the madness of love […] by

Aphrodite and Eros" (Plato 1990). This passage is amply treated by Ficino in the final pages of his *Commentarium in* Convivium *Platonis*, whence Pico draws the order of the four madnesses, or *furores*, described later. On the *divinus furor*, see also Ficino's letter to Pellegrino Agli (Gentile 1990; Ficino 1576, 613ff.). The translation of the Greek *manía* into the Latin *furor* appears in Cicero, *De divinatione* 1.80: "Negat enim sine furore Democritus quemquam poetam magnum esse posse, quod idem dicit Plato. Quem, si placet, appellet furorem, dum modo is furor ita laudetur ut in Phaedro Platonis laudatus est" ("Democritus says that no one can be a great poet without being in a state of frenzy, and Plato says the same thing. Let Plato call it 'frenzy' if he will, provided he praises it as it was praised in his *Phaedrus*," Falconer trans. in Cicero 1959). See Plato, *Phaedrus* 244a.

123 John 5:19: "Scimus quoniam ex Deo sumus: et mundus totus in maligno positus est" ("We know that we are of God, and the whole world is seated in wickedness").

124 See Virgil, *Aen*. 6.19. See Marsilio Ficino, *Commentarium in* Convivium *Platonis* 7.14: "Alas animo tribuit, per quas in sublime feratur" ("[Plato] attributes wings to the soul, by which it may be borne to the sublime," Jayne trans. in Ficino 1944). See also §§48 and 94.

125 Marsilio Ficino, *Theologia Platonica* 1.6: "Aliud tamen mens erit, aliud veritas. Quod sic aperit Zoroaster: Μάνθανε τὸ νοητόν, ἐπεὶ ἔξω νόου ὑπάρχει, id est: 'Scito intellegibile ipsum esse extra mentem'" ("Yet mind and truth will still be different things. Zoroaster unfolded it like this: 'Be aware that the intelligible lies outside the mind,'" Allen, trans. in Allen 1981). See *Chaldean Oracles* 1.10 (Des Places 1971, 66).

126 Marsilio Ficino, *Commentarium in* Convivium *Platonis* 7.14: "Primus itaque furor inconcinna et dissonantia temperat" ("So the first kind of madness tempers dissonant and unharmonious parts," Jayne trans. in Ficino 1944).

127 Marsilio Ficino, *Commentarium in* Convivium *Platonis* 7.14: “Primus quidem poeticus furor, alter mysterialis, tertius vaticinium, amatorius affectus est quartus. Est autem poesis a Musis, mysterium a Dionysio, vaticinium ab Apolline, amor a Venere” (“The first is the poetic madness, the second is that of the mysteries, the third is that of prophecy, and the fourth is that of love. Moreover, the poetry is from the Muses, the mystery from Dionysus, the prophecy from Apollo, and the love from Venus,” Jayne trans. in Ficino 1944). Ficino, while paraphrasing Plato’s *Phaedrus*, gives the four *furores* a different order, which is followed by Pico. See Plato, *Phaedrus* 265b.

128 Second *furor*, the *furor mysterialis*. See note 127.

129 On the relation between Dionysus and Apollo (to whom the appellation Musagetes normally refers), see Plutarch, *On the E at Delphi* 389b–c.

130 Romans 1:20: “Invisibilia enim ipsius, a creatura mundi, per ea quae facta sunt, intellecta, conspiciuntur” (“For the invisible things of him, from the creation of the world, are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made”). See Ficino, *De divino furore*, a letter to Pellegrino Agli (in Ficino 1576, 613): “Itaque Paulus ac Dionysius, Christianorum theologorum sapientissimi, invisibilia Dei, asserunt, per ea quae facta sunt queque hic cernuntur intelligi” (“Paul and Dionysius, the wisest of the Christian theologians, affirm that the invisible things of God are understood from what has been made and is to be seen here,” trans. in Ficino 1975–2003, 1:43–44).

131 Psalm 35:9: “Inebriabuntur ab ubertate domus tuae” (“They shall be inebriated with the plenty of thy house”).

132 Hebrews 3:5: “Et Moses quidem fidelis erat in tota domo eius tamquam famulus” (“And Moses indeed was faithful in all his house as a servant”). Additionally, Heb. 3:2: “Qui fidelis est ei qui fecit illum sicut et Moses in omni domo illius” (“Who is faithful to him that made him, as was

also Moses in all his house”), which is a quotation of Num. 12:7: “At non talis servus meus Moses, qui in omni domo mea fidelissimus est” (“But it is not so with my servant Moses who is most faithful in all my house”).

133 Cf. Homer, *Iliad* 1.70, cited in Plutarch’s *On the E at Delphi* 387b. This is the third *furor*, the *vaticinium* (see note 127).

134 The fourth *furor*, the *amatorius affectus* (“loving emotion”) (see note 127).

135 The original term, *aestrus* or *oestrus*, derives from the Greek οἶστρος (lit. “gadfly”), which was often used metaphorically, as in Sophocles and Euripides, to refer to any stimulus that drives one mad. See Pico’s letter to Benivieni of 12 November 1486 (in Dorez 1895, 358). See also Bausi (Pico 2003, 54).

136 On the ardent seraphim, cf. §§54 and 57. See, again, Ficino’s *De divino furore* (in Ficino 1576, 613): “in hac autem ipsa alarum recuperatione abstrahi a corpore illarum vi animum Deoque plenum ad Superos trahi ac vehementer anniti” (“On recovery of these wings, the soul is separated from the body by their power. Filled with God, it strives with all its might to reach the heavens and thither it is drawn,” Allen trans. in Allen 1981).

137 Galatians 2:20: “Vivo autem iam non ego, vivit vero in me Christus” (“And I live, now not I; but Christ liveth in me”).

138 Cf. Plutarch, *On the E at Delphi* 385b.

139 This philosopher, who was Plutarch’s teacher, belonged to the Platonic Academy; he is one of the main characters of Plutarch’s *On the E at Delphi*. See Plutarch, *On the E at Delphi* 385b–c.

140 The whole passage is clearly dependent on Plutarch's *On the E at Delphi*, where the three Delphic maxims are commented on.

141 John 1:9: "Erat lux vera, quae illuminat omnem hominem venientem in hunc mundum" ("That was the true light, which enlighteneth every man that cometh into this world").

142 Cf. Plutarch, *On the E at Delphi* 385d.

143 Cf. Plutarch, *On the E at Delphi* 385d and passim.

144 Cf. Nonius Marcellus (1903, 1:62, 83); Cicero, *Orator* 21. See also Bausi (Pico 2003, 56–57).

145 Plato, *Alcibiades* I (131a–33c).

146 Cf. Plutarch, *On the E at Delphi* 392a and passim.

147 On the reception of Pythagoras during the Renaissance, see Casini (1998).

148 Cf. Iamblichus, *De vita Pythagorica* 8.44.

149 Cf. Iamblichus, *Protrepticus* 21 (Iamblichus 1967, 107, 116–17; Iamblichus 1989, 134, 142–43); Porphyry, *Vita Pythagorae* 42; Ficino, *Symbola Pythagorae philosophi*; Ficino, *Commentariolus in symbola Pythagorae* (in Ficino 1937, 2:102).

150 Cf. Iamblichus, *Protrepticus* 21 (Iamblichus 1967, 107–8, 115, 121–22; Iamblichus 1989, 134, 141, 147); Ficino, *Symbola Pythagorae philosophi* (in Ficino 1576, 1979); Ficino, *Commentariolus in symbola Pythagorae* (in Ficino 1937, 2:102–3). Cf. also Diogenes Laertius 7.34–35; Hesiod, *Opera et dies* 727, 742–43; Pliny, *Natural History* 28.69.

151 Ficino, *Commentariolus in symbola Pythagorae* (in Ficino 1937, 2:100): “Mingere est purgari, incidere ungues etiam est amovere a te superba et vilia” (“To urinate is to purge oneself, to cut the nails is to distance oneself from prideful and vile things”). See Celenza (1999, 694–95).

152 Cf. Plato, *Republic* 508b–c.

153 Cf. Iamblichus, *Protrepticus* 21; Ficino, *Symbola Pythagorae philosophi*; Ficino, *Commentariolus in symbola Pythagorae* (in Ficino 1937, 2:101). See Celenza (1999, 695–97).

154 Cf. Plato, *Alcibiades* I (133c).

155 “Solid food” in this context recalls Paul’s admonition not to take spiritual food that is too strong before one is ready. See Heb. 5:12–14: “Etenim cum deberetis magistri esse propter tempus rursum indigetis ut vos doceamini quae sint elementa exordii sermonum Dei et facti estis quibus lacte opus sit non solido cibo. Omnis enim qui lactis est particeps expers est sermonis iustitiae parvulus enim est; perfectorum autem est solidus cibus eorum qui pro consuetudine exercitatos habent sensus ad discretionem boni ac mali” (“For whereas for the time you ought to be masters, you have need to be taught again what are the first elements of the words of God: and you are become such as have need of milk, and not of strong meat [*solido cibo*]. For every one that is a partaker of milk, is unskillful in the word of justice: for he is a little child. But strong meat [*solidus cibus*] is for the perfect; for them who by custom have their senses exercised to the discerning of good and evil”). Regarding ambrosia, see notes 107 and 121.

156 Cf. Prov. 30:30–31: “Leo, fortissimus bestiarum, ad nullius pavebit occorsum; gallus succinctus lumbos, et aries; nec est rex, qui resistat ei” (“A lion, the strongest of beasts, who hath no fear of anything he meeteth: A cock girded about the loins: and a ram: and a king, whom none can resist”). See, moreover, Ficino, *De vita coelitus comparanda* 3.14 (in Ficino 1576, 550).

157 Job 38:36; cf. Ficino, *Commentariolus in symbola Pythagorae* (in Ficino 1937, 2:102).

158 Cf. Ficino, *Commentariolus in symbola Pythagorae* (in Ficino 1937, 2:102). See Matt. 26:74–75: “Et continuo gallus cantavit. Et recordatus est Petrus verbi Iesu, quod dixerat: prius quam gallus cantet, ter me negabis” (“And immediately the cock crew. And Peter remembered the word of Jesus which he had said: Before the cock crows, thou wilt deny me thrice”).

159 Cf. Job 38:7: “Cum me laudarent simul astra matutina […]” (“When the morning stars praised me together […]”).

160 The greater world (*maior mundus*) is the Neoplatonic Macrocosmos or Megacosmos.

161 Plato, *Phaedo* 118a. Since those who recovered from illness often sacrificed a cock to Aesculapius as recognition for their cure, these famous last words of Socrates were commonly taken to mean that he viewed death as the ultimate remedy for the vicissitudes of this life.

162 Unfortunately, the nature of Pico’s sources is not clear. Some texts had been brought to his attention by Flavius Mithridates (see Pico’s letter to Ficino written in autumn 1486, in *Supplementum Ficinianum*, 272–73: “Chaldaici hi libri sunt, si libri sunt et non thesauri: In primis Ezre, Zoroastris et Melchiar Magorum oracula, in quibus et illa quoque, que apud Graecos mendosa et mutila circumferuntur, leguntur integra et absoluta. Tum est in illa Chaldeorum sapientum brevis quidem et salebrosa, sed plena misteriis interpretatio. Est itidem et libellus de dogmatis Chaldaice theologie cum Persarum, Grecorum et Chaldeorum in illa divina et locupletissima enarratione” (“These are the Chaldean books, if they are to be considered books and not treasures: first the oracles of the Mages, Ezra, Zoroaster, and Melcher, in which one can read in its absolute integrity what has been transmitted only in fragments and full of mistakes among the Greeks. In those books is contained the somewhat condensed and hard to decipher, yet comprehensive, interpretation of the mysteries of the Chaldean

wise men. One equally finds in them also a small book about the dogmas of the Chaldean theology, with a divine and most authoritative explanation of the Persians', the Greeks', and the Chaldeans'"). Pico certainly had some texts or fragments written in a language that Wirszubski, on the basis of the extant fragments preserved in the Palatino manuscript (for example, the names of the paradisiacal rivers listed in §134), considered to be a mixture of Aramaic, Syrian, and Hebrew, written in Ethiopic characters. These "texts," however, might obviously have been fabricated, perhaps by Flavius Mithridates himself (Farmer 1998, 13, 486–87). Pico considered them, as in the preceding quotation, as being genuine versions (perhaps the originals) of the *Chaldean Oracles*; according to him they were better and richer than the compilation of scattered Greek fragments that circulated under that title (on the fortune of the Greek *Chaldean Oracles* during the Renaissance, see Dannenfeldt 1957). Gemistus Pletho might have been the first to believe that the *Chaldean Oracles* embodied sentences by Zoroaster (see also Masai 1956, 136ff.; Bidez and Cumont 1938; Duchesne-Guillemin 1958, 4). He was followed by Ficino in the *Theologia Platonica* (see Gentile 1990). See also Bausi (Pico 2003, 173–75).

163 See Psellus, *Summaria et brevis dogmatum Chaldaicorum expositio* (*PG* 122.1152d).

164 See note 127.

165 *PG* 122.1129a.

166 The names of the rivers are not available in the *editio princeps*, and the *lacunae* are normally filled in later editions with the Hebrew names of the paradisiacal rivers (Gen. 2:10–14). In the Palatino manuscript, Wirszubski (Wirszubski 1989, 242, and in Mithridates 1963, 38ff.) was able to read the four names as written in Ethiopic letters, but in a language that can be interpreted as a mixture of Aramaic, Syriac, and Hebrew, as follows: 1. q-s-t = "truth" (in Syriac); 2. k-?-r-n = "expiation" (in Hebrew); 3. n-h-r = "light" (in Aramaic); 4. r-h-m-n-t = "piety" (in Hebrew). See fig. 4.

167 The phrase “northern line” translates *boreali amussi*. *Amussis* was a term variously used to signify an instrument employed to ascertain the degree to which a flat surface was level or precise. Pico may intend here nothing more esoteric than the plane one establishes while aligning one’s sight through the eyepieces of an astrolabe (or by levelling a quadrant, nocturnal, or other navigational device) pointed toward Polaris (the North Star). Hence, we could assume here an image, albeit a rather complicated one, that approximates the modern expression “moral compass.” The reference to Iberian waves could be, as Bausi conjectures, to Seneca (Pico 2003, 64). See also the notion of “median line” in Idel (2005, *Ascensions* 167–81).

168 The North, therefore, would represent dialectics; the East, natural philosophy; the South, theology; and the West, moral philosophy.

169 Psalm 54:18: “Vespere, et mane, et meridie, narrabo, et annuntiabo” (“Evening and morning, and at noon I will speak and declare”). Augustine, *De genesi ad litteram* 4.30.47: “[…] ubi semper est dies in contemplatione incommutabilis veritatis, semper vespera in cognitione in seipsa creaturae, semper mane etiam ex hac cognitione in laude Creatoris” (“when it is always day in the immutable contemplation of truth, it is always evening in man’s awareness of himself and morning always arises from that awareness in praise of the Creator”). See also Augustine, *Enarrationes in Psalmos* 54.18: “Evangeliza tu, noli tacere quod accepisti, vespere, de praeteritis; mane, de futuris; meridie, de sempiternis” (“Do thou proclaim glad tidings, keep not secret that which thou hast received, ‘in evening’ of things gone by, ‘in morning’ of things to be, ‘at noon’ of things ever to be,” Augustine of Hippo, 1888). Morning, then, comes to be associated with natural philosophy, evening with moral philosophy, and noon with theology. This pattern, with the exception of dialectics, is compatible with the allegory of the cardinal directions listed in note 168.

170 Cf. Gen. 12:1–13:3, 13:14–15; *Conclusiones* 1.28.14.

171 The “Moors” are, more accurately, the Arabs. See *Conclusiones* 1.21.3. This could be a reference to the ideas that informed *Conclusiones*

1.28.21 inasmuch as midday, like the South, belongs to theology.

172 On the prohibition against disclosing the contents of the mysteries, see, for one example among many, Plotinus, *Enneads* 6.9.11: “This is the intention of the command given in the mysteries here below not to disclose to the uninitiated” (Plotinus 1966–88).

173 For the phrase “our man,” see note 87.

174 Jeremiah 9:21: “Quia ascendit mors per fenestras nostras, ingressa est domos nostras” (“For death is come up through our windows, it is entered into our houses”). Bausi reminds us that the windows of our souls are our senses, through which we are susceptible to temptation. He likewise notes that Plato associated our liver and breast with concupiscence and wrath, respectively (Pico 2003, 67).

175 For a possible source of this angelological conclusion, see Gregory the Great, *XL Homiliarum in Evangelia libri duo* 34.9 (*PL* 76.1251a): “Raphael vero dicitur medicina Dei” (“In truth, Raphael is called the medicine of God”). Cf. Tob. 3:25: “Et missus est angelus Domini, ut curaret eos ambos, quorum uno tempore sunt orationes in conspectu Domini recitatae” (“And the holy angel of the Lord, Raphael was sent to heal them both, whose prayers at one time were rehearsed in the sight of the Lord”). On the names of the angels as connected to the doctrine of the sefirot (a connection which might be alluded to through the words “the most hidden mysteries”), see Yates (1979). For Raphael as healer, see, for example, *Tob.* 3.25–26 and 11.8ff.

176 Cf. Gregory the Great, *XL Homiliarum in Evangelia libri duo* 34.9 (*PL* 76.1251a): “Gabriel autem, fortitudo Dei” (“And Gabriel is the strength of God”).

177 Cf. Gregory the Great, *XL Homiliarum in Evangelia libri duo* 34.9 (*PL* 76.1251a): “Michael namque, qui ut Deus” (“And Michael, who is like God”).

178 Psalm 20:4: “Posuisti in capite eius coronam de lapide pretioso” (“thou hast set on his head a crown of precious stones”).

179 For an example of an analogous use of the term *fortune*, see Pico, *Epistle 36* (to Andrea Corneus), 15 October 1486 (Pico 1971, *Opera omnia* 1:376–79), to which this whole section of the *Oration* is very similar (Bori 2000, 73–77): “Everyone must act this way, especially those whom fortune has treated so benevolently that they can live not merely splendidly and comfortably, but also magnificently. Great fortunes raise one up to the skies and therefore induce ostentation but, like an indomitable, bucking steed, they often behave badly and torment, rather than transport, him who rides upon them” (Pico 1971, 1:377).

180 As Bausi (Pico 2003, 68) notes, this whole passage recalls the opening paragraph of Cicero’s *De finibus bonorum and malorum* (*On Moral Ends*), where we find a similar defence of philosophical studies: “In this work I am putting into Latin themes which philosophers of the highest talent and most refined learning have dealt with in Greek, and I am well aware, Brutus, that this will incur criticism of various kinds. Some people, by no means uneducated, altogether disapprove of philosophizing. Others do not criticize it so long as it is done in an easygoing manner, but consider that one should not devote so much of one’s enthusiasm and attention to it” (Cicero 2001b).

181 See again Pico’s letter to Andrea Corneus: “Men’s minds have been invaded by the ruinous and monstrous conviction that noblemen ought to refrain from philosophical studies or, at most, that they should taste them only with the edge of their lips in order to show off their intelligence, rather than putting them into practice, in peace, so as to better themselves. They consider Neoptolemus’ saying as a decree: no one, or just a very few, should engage in philosophy” (Pico 1971, 1:377). The Neoptolemus referred to here is the protagonist of a lost tragedy by Ennius quoted by, among others, Cicero (*De Republica* 1.18.30): “He much preferred Ennius’ Neoptolemus, who said that ‘he wanted to be a philosopher but only a little; it didn’t please him totally’” (Cicero 1999b). See also *De Oratore* 2.37.156: “I have determined to philosophize, as Neoptolemus says in Ennius, ‘In a few things, for I don’t want to do so in all ways’” (Cicero 1979–82); Aulus

Gellius (1984, *Attic Nights* 5.15.9): “I agreed with Ennius’ Neoptolemus, who rightly says: ‘Philosophizing there must be, but by the few; / Since for all men it’s not to be desired.’”

182 Here Pico outlines again a comprehensive plan for philosophical study in three stages, ascending from the investigation of earthly phenomena and natural philosophy (“the causes of things, the ways of nature”) to celestial phenomena (“the logic of the universe”) and theological mysteries (the plans of God, the mysteries of Heaven and Earth). The passage is reminiscent of Cicero, *Tusculan Disputations* (4.57): “[W]isdom is the knowledge of things divine and human, together with an understanding of each thing’s cause” (Cicero 2002).

183 “The study of wisdom” is an etymological reflection of the Greek φιλοσοφία (“philosophy”). Cf. Augustine, *Against the Academicians* 3.9.20: “Listen, my friend, philosophy is not called wisdom itself but the zeal for wisdom” (Augustine of Hippo 1995); Augustine, *Epistles* 3.149.2: “[…] and what is philosophy in Latin, if not the study of wisdom?” Cf. also Cicero, *Tusculan Disputations* 1.1: “The theoretical study of all the skills which have to do with the right way of living is to be identified with the pursuit of wisdom, that is, *philosophy*. So I decided that I should expound this in Latin” (Cicero 1985).

184 See again Pico’s letter to Andrea Corneus: “Would it therefore be ignoble or wholly improper for a nobleman gratuitously to pursue wisdom? Who could hear or tolerate such a thing without irritation? No one who has practiced philosophy in such a way as to be able or unable to do so has ever truly been a philosopher. Such a man has engaged in commerce, not philosophy” (Pico 1971, 1:377). As Bausi (Pico 2003, 70) notes, this passage also echoes *Convivio* 1.9.3–5, where Dante, however, speaks against perverting the pursuit of “letters” in general (not philosophy, in particular) into practical and monetary advantage. Such a scornful attitude toward the pursuit of knowledge is one of the main themes of the early humanists (cf., e.g., Petrarch’s *Invective contra medicum* and Boccaccio’s *Genealogiae deorum gentilium* 14).

185 See §161 and §§65–66, where “the order of Pallas” is described as that of cherubic contemplation that brings to fruition the link between love (the seraphim) and justice or law (the thrones): throughout the *Oration* and *Conclusiones,* as the personification of Wisdom or Philosophy, Pallas signifies the intellectual nature which leads to wisdom (in *Conclusiones* 2.5.14 and 2.11.10, the Orphean Pallas is associated with the cabalists’ Metatron).

186 Cf. Plato, *Republic* 495c. For the image of chaste Philosophy as neglected, scorned, and reduced to prostitution, one may also recall these famous verses from Petrarch (1976, *RVF* 7.10–11): “Povera e nuda vai, Philosophia, / dice la turba al vil guadagno intesa” (“‘Philosophy, you go poor and naked!’ / says the mob, bent on low gain”).

187 That is, “remuneration.”

188 This may be a reference to the fact that in 1483 Pico renounced the administration of his patrimony, securing for himself only one-third of its revenues (Pico 2003, 72). According to Gianfrancesco, he renounced all earthly possessions three years before his death (in 1496).

189 See again the epistle to Andrea Corneus, in which Pico speaks about the opposition between active and contemplative life: “But you might say: I want you to embrace Martha [the active life], but without abandoning Mary [the contemplative life]. I do not reject this opinion; in truth, I neither condemn nor impugn anyone who holds it. But maintaining that it is not a mistake to pass from a contemplative to a public life is very different from considering one’s refusal to do so to be an act of slothfulness or, indeed, even a sin or a crime” (Pico 1971, 1:377). As to whether the active life is more excellent than the contemplative, see Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* 2.2.182.1 (which follows Aristotle’s *Ethics* 10.7.8). This question was vigorously debated in humanist circles: see Cristoforo Landino (1424–1504), *Disputationes Camaldulenses* 1. See also Philippus de Harveng, *Commentaria in cantica canticorum* 3.7 and 3.11.

190 Bori (2000, 76) notes that this passage echoes Plato's *Apology of Socrates* 28a–34d, where we read: "I greet you, Athenians, with affection, but I shall obey the god rather than you, and so long as I am alive and capable I will not stop doing philosophy…" (Plato 1997).

191 Literally "barking opponents." The Latin term *oblatrator* is found in Sidonius, *Epist*. 1.3.2 and 4.22.6 (Bausi 1996, 136), and in the feminine form in Plautus's *Miles gloriosus* 3.1.87. See §264 and Jerome, *Epist*. 133.13.

192 Cf. Plato, *Phaedrus* 247a: "First in the heavens travels Zeus […] after him there follows an army of gods and divinities, ordered in eleven companies […] and after them follows anyone who wishes and is able to do so, for jealousy is excluded from the divine chorus" (Plato 2005).

193 It is difficult to ascertain who exactly has taken these differently nuanced positions toward the idea of a public discussion of Pico's nine hundred theses. Bori (2000, 75) conjectures that this whole segment, from where the text departs from the extant manuscript P in the second line of §143 ("And I would certainly not elaborate on them …") to §150, was added to the text of the *Oration* by inserting parts of the letter to Corneus, written in mid-October 1486. Bausi (1996, 111–12), however, conjectures that Pico's defence of philosophy was part of his answer to the five objections that were addressed to him after the publication of the nine hundred theses. On the history of the text in its present edition, including a synopsis of the manuscript P, the *editio princeps*, and Pico's *Apologia*, published in Naples in 1487, see Massimo Riva's preface and Pier Cesare Bori's and Michael Papio's introductions to this volume.

194 Bausi (Pico 2003, 76) observes that this whole passage echoes Angelo Poliziano's commentary on Statius's *Silvae*, where Poliziano quotes Aristotle (*Problemata* 916b.19), saying that "even the most contentious argument greatly sharpens the intellect" ("Contentiosa enim illa disputatio, ut Aristoteles scribit, magnopere ingenium exacuit"). Cf. Poliziano (1978, 92).

195 Cf. Sidonius, *Epist*. 1.6, 2.9.

196 The term *barzel* (“iron”) occurs seventy-six times in the Old Testament and appears for the first time in Gen. 4:22. All of the occurrences refer, either literally or metaphorically, to the significance of iron. The metaphorical aspect that interests us here is one that alludes to the ideas of physical force, harshness, difficulty, and resistance. Grinding iron against iron symbolizes the way in which a sage tempers the presence of another person’s spirit in such a way that, as a result, the latter’s ability to react will become razor sharp. See, for example, Prov. 27:17: “Iron sharpens itself with iron and man sharpens the intelligence of his companion,” and also Cicognani’s note (in my translation): “In the Talmud the wise are likened to iron, which is ground and sharpened by beating one piece against the other. See the Babylonian Talmud, discussed in the book of *Ta’anith*, p. 7a. ‘Rab Hammah observes: what is the significance of the text of Prov. 27:17: *iron and iron together*? As it occurs among instruments of iron, where one sharpens the other, so it is also the case among two wise men who sharpen themselves one against the other” (in Pico 1943, 119). Cf. Bausi (Pico 2003, 172).

197 What is here translated as “horoscope” is literally *genesi* (“the moment of birth”).

198 Literally, “they desire […] that Mars face Mercury directly from a horizontal trine.” “*Triquetrus aspectus* (the 120° angle formed by the position of the two planets in question) is […] a technical astrological term: cf. Pliny the Elder, *Natural History* 2.77” (Bausi 1996, 132). It signifies a most propitious conjunction. See also Carena (in Pico 1994, 75): “*Triquetrus*, said of a celestial body at a distance of one third of the zodiac from another body or, rather, that forms with that body one side of an equilateral triangle in the zodiac.” See also Cicognani’s note in his edition (in Pico 1943, 119): “The astrological viewpoint spoken of here is called ‘triangular aspect,’ which means that the two lines of sight construct a 120° angle, one of the most favourable aspects; and the would-be philosopher will have to the highest degree the conjunction of hermetic intelligence (Mercury) and pugnacious prowess (Mars).” See also Pico, *Disputationes*

adversus astrologiam divinatricem 6.14.16 and 10.9 (with the corresponding annotations by E. Garin in Pico 1946–52); Pliny the Younger, *Natural History* 2.59, 2.77, 2.80; Lucretius, *De rerum natura* 1.717, 4.653; Julius Caesar, *Bellum Gallicum* 5.13.1.

199 Bausi (1996, 140) notes the transitive use of *incidere* with the simple accusative, found in poetry (see Lucretius, *De rerum natura* 4.568), in post-classical Latin (Solinus, Tacitus, and especially Apuleius) and in the Christian authors. See Ermolao Barbaro, *Temistius* fol. 113v.

200 Cf. Job 32:8: “But, as I see, there is a spirit in men, and the inspiration of the Almighty giveth understanding.”

201 Cf. 1 Tim. 4:12: “Let no man despise thy youth: but be thou an example of the faithful in word, in conversation, in charity, in faith, in chastity.”

202 Cf. §151. The term “good arts” is found in Ovid (1988, *Tristia* 3.7.32): “So put aside the causes of sloth, accomplished girl, return to [noble arts] and thy sacred offerings” (Wheeler trans., with modifications). See also Augustine, *In Psalmum IX Enarratio* (*PL* 36.127).

203 For the allusion to Pythagoras (who chose for himself the term “philosopher,” or “lover of wisdom,” rather than that of “wise man”), see §120 and notes.

204 Cf. Horace, *Ars Poetica* 38–40: “Pick a subject, writers, equal to your strength and take some time to consider what your shoulders should refuse and what they can bear” (Horace 1995b).

205 For the term *imbecillissimus*, see Cornelius Celsus 2.18; Seneca, *De beneficiis* 4.18. Pico uses the term in his letter to Corneus and numerous times elsewhere in his works.

206 Cf. Titus Livius, *Ab urbe condita* 28.14.12 and 33.5.

207 Pico's self-justification continues, in parallel with the text of the *Apologia*, until §266.

208 Cicero, *On Moral Ends* (*De finibus bonorum et malorum*) 1.2: "The second class of critics, who, however much they approve of philosophy, nevertheless would rather have it less eagerly prosecuted, are asking for a restraint that is not easy to practise. The study is one that when once taken up admits of no restriction or control. In fact, the attitude of the former class, who attempt to dissuade us from philosophy altogether, seems almost less unreasonable than that of those who would set limits to what is essentially unlimited, and expect us to stop half-way in a study that increases in value the further it proceeds" (Cicero 1999a). Bausi adds a further reference to 1.3 (Pico 2003, 80–81n172). Carena adds a reference to the catalogue of the books possessed by Pico (Kibre 1936, no. 1217). According to Reich and Buck, who follow Reich's apparatus to the letter, "no exactly corresponding passage" can be found. Reich adds a reference to Cicero, *Philippicae* 8.3.10 (Wuilleumier 99), "What do *we* promise our armies? Far better and greater rewards" (Cicero 1986), and *Cato maior* (Carena in Pico 1994, 17, but the quotation is imprecise: see Cicero, *Cato maior de senectute* 6.17: "non facit ea [senectus] quae iuvenes; at vero multo maiora et meliora facit" ["Granted that an old man does not do what young men do: still, the things he does are vastly more significant and more worthwhile," Copley trans. in Cicero 1967]).

209 Propertius, *Elegiae* 2.10.5–6. See Kibre (1936, nos. 236, 324, 795). Compare the closing paragraph of the *Heptaplus*'s second proem.

210 Gorgias of Leontini (c. 485–c. 380 BC) was a major representative of early Sophistry. See Diels and Kranz (1951–52, 82A.1a, from Philostratus, *Vitae sophistarum* 1.9.1ff.).

211 Cf. §158. For the reference to Gorgias, prince of dispute, see Cicero, *De Oratore* 3.32.129: "And Gorgias was actually the very first to dare, in

large gatherings, to call on people to tell him what subject each of them wanted to hear about” (Cicero 2001a). See also Cicero, *Brutus* 12.46–47; Cicero, *On Moral Ends* 2.1. See Kibre (1936, nos. 55, 507, 331). Regarding Aristotle, see the Τεχνῶν συναγωγὴ (*Technôn sunagôgê*: “collection of systems”), “which, to integrate his *Rhetoric*, contained a history of eloquence in the presentation of the single systems (τέχναι)” (Cicero 1962, 28n). See also *Sophistici elenchi* 34.183b36–184a1: “For the training given by the paid teachers of contentious argument resembled the system of Gorgias. For some of them gave their pupils to learn by heart speeches which were either rhetorical or consisted of questions and answers, in which both sides thought that the rival arguments were for the most part included” (Aristotle 1955).

212 Cf. §186.

213 Cf. §186.

214 Horace, *Epistles* 1.1.14: “nullius addictus iurare in verba magistri” (“I am not bound over to swear as any master dictates,” Horace 2005). Cf. Kibre (1936, nos. 37, 109, 357, 414, 718); Quintilian, *Institutio oratoria* 1.8.19.

215 The correspondence with the text of manuscript Palatino 885, interrupted at §169, is resumed here and continues to §190. A significant omission, with respect to the text of the Palatino, is to be noted. The text of the Palatino manuscript reads: “My first aim was not to swear by anyone else’s words but to pore over all masters of philosophy, to examine all books, and to become acquainted with all schools. […] I discovered that in order to do so it was necessary to know not only the Greek and Latin languages, but also the Hebrew and Chaldean languages, and the Arabic language as well, with which I have just begun to labour under the guidance of William Mithridates, an expert on all these languages.” The William Mithridates mentioned here by Pico is the Jewish Orientalist, his collaborator and teacher, better known as Flavius Mithridates: “a much sought-after translator, he had to flee from Rome in 1483 after a mysterious crime. […] Willelmus Ramundus Mithridates, professor of arts and sacred

theology, member of the curia and translator from the Hebrew, Arabic, Chaldean, Greek and Latin languages." This was the title he gave himself in the edition of the *Dicta septem sapientium* dated 24 March 1485 in Cologne (Secret 1965, 170). According to Farmer (1998, 167), this "passage praising Flavius Mithridates" and similar ones are "suspiciously left out of the *Oration* as Gian Francesco printed it," a circumstance that may be an indication (Farmer 1998, 171n108) of the shrewd "editorial sieve" applied by Gianfrancesco to the text of the 1496 Bolognese edition (Farmer 1998, 169). On the Chaldean language, see §199.

216 The proposition is omitted in the Palatino manuscript. Olivier Boulnois comments: "Pico does not reject the Medieval principle of dispute; on the contrary, he extends it to everything that may be thought" (in Pico 1993, 328) because "if the *Discourse* has *man's dignity* as its object, its aim is to permit the integration of all things within the peace of the absolute. […] Hence, the aim pursued is not that of constituting an *inventory*, but that of restoring a theological and philosophical peace, the foundation of all the other, moral and political, forms of peace" (Pico 1993, 326–27).

217 Horace, *Epistles* 1.1.15: "quo me cumque rapit tempestas, deferor hospes" ("wherever the storm drives me, I turn in for comfort," Horace 2005). See Kibre (1936, nos. 37, 109, 357, 414, 718). This, too, is omitted in the Palatino manuscript.

218 See *De vita Aristotelis* 1–3 (Aristotle 1967, 428) and 14–15 (Aristotle 1967, 443).

219 The "Stoa," that is, the portico (or "porch" as here) in Athens, where in about 300 BC the Stoic School had its original seat.

220 Plato's school, the Academy, is thus called because it had its seat near the gardens dedicated to the legendary hero Academos.

221 The Palatino manuscript adds: “In the past there has never been, nor will there ever be after us, anyone whose task is to understand the whole truth. Its vastness goes beyond the human capacity to be equal to it.”

222 From this point on, the text begins to follow the order of the exposition of the nine hundred theses, which can be divided into two major and numerous minor sections. The first main section can be defined as “quasi-historical” and is subdivided into several minor sections that present in reverse chronological order the “opinions of the pagans and their heresiarchs.” Thus, “the Latin scholastics (§186) are followed by the Arabs (§187), the Arabs by the Greeks (§§188–90), the Greeks by the Chaldeans (§199), the Chaldeans by the Egyptians (§199), and the Egyptians by the Hebrew cabalist wise men (§199). The second main section contains, in turn, theses “presented according to Pico’s own opinion (*secundum opinionem propriam*)” §195, §199, and following sections (Farmer 1998, 8). As Pignagnoli notes, “by ‘our own,’ Pico means the Scholastics” (in Pico 1969, 119n); cf. *Conclusiones* 1.1.1–6.11 (Farmer 1998, 212–49). The “Latin” authors quoted by Pico “are all to be found in abundance in his library” (Carena in Pico 1994, 76n).

223 Cf. *Conclusiones* 1.4.1–22 (Farmer 1998, 236–41). John Duns Scotus (ca. 1266–1308) is considered one of the most important thinkers of the entire scholastic period, surnamed *Doctor subtilis* (“the subtle Doctor”) for his highly technical and meticulous reasoning.

224 Cf. *Conclusiones* 1.2.1–45 (Farmer 1998, 218–31).

225 Cf. *Conclusiones* 1.6.1–11 (Farmer 1998, 246–49).

226 Cf. *Conclusiones* 1.3.1–8 (Farmer 1998, 232–35).

227 Cf. *Conclusiones* 1.1.1–16 (Farmer 1998, 212–17). Albertus Magnus (ca. 1200–1280), also known as Saint Albert the Great, was a Dominican theologian and philosopher.

228 Cf. *Conclusiones* 1.5.1–13 (Farmer 1998, 242–45). Henry of Ghent (ca. 1217–1293) was a philosopher and theologian at the University of Paris.

229 Pico's style of enumeration is modelled on a passage in Cicero's *De Oratore* (3.7.28).

230 Cf. *Conclusiones* 1.7.1–1.14.2 (Farmer 1998, 250–81). The Arab authors cited are also "all in Pico's library" (Carena in Pico 1994, 76n).

231 Cf. *Conclusiones* 1.7.1–41 (Farmer 1998, 50–63). Ibn Rushd (1126–1198), the "commentator of Aristotle," was famous in the Latin world under the name of Averroes. He was a scholar well grounded in Muslim religious studies and in the positive sciences (physics, medicine and biology, astronomy), as well as being a theologian and philosopher.

232 Cf. *Conclusiones* 1.14.1–2 (Farmer 1998, 280–81). Ibn Bājja (late 1000s–1139), known as Avempace in the medieval West, was a famous philosopher and *wazir* of Spain in the twelfth century. Together with Averroes in the Islamic West and Avicenna in the East, he was one of the greatest of all Islamic philosophers. There is no doubt, moreover, that the philosophical mysticism of Ibn Bājja's work *The Regime of the Solitary Man* had a great influence on Ibn Tufayl's philosophical novel *Risalat Hayy ibn Yaqzan* ("The Story of Hayyi ibn Yaqzan"), which was of great importance to Pico. The Hebrew version of this novel was "translated into Latin by Pico himself for his own personal use, under the influence of Johanan Alemanno" (Cassuto 1918, 322; Cicognani in Pico 1941, 114n). According to Wirszubski, "the person who next to Flavius Mithridates matters most for the study of Pico's encounter with the Kabbala is Johanan Alemanno" (Wirszubski 1989, 256).

233 Cf. *Conclusiones* 1.9.1–11 (Farmer 1998, 268–71). Al-Farabi (870–950), known to the Middle Ages as Alfarabius or Avennasar, was one of the most prominent Muslim philosophers.

234 Cf. *Conclusiones* 1.8.1–12 (Farmer 1998, 264–67). Ibn-Sina (980–1037), known in the West as Avicenna, had a comprehensive philosophical system that was much indebted to Aristotle and, to a certain extent, to Neoplatonic doctrines, but featured substantial original thought.

235 Cf. *Conclusiones* 1.15.1–1.19.5 (Farmer 1998, 282–95).

236 Simplicius (ca. 490–560), a Neoplatonist philosopher, was one of the chief commentators of Aristotle. In Pico's library could be found Avicenna's commentaries to Aristotle's *Categories* (Kibre 1936, nos. 439, 452, 1616), *De anima* (Kibre 1936, no. 447), *De caelo* (Kibre 1936, nos. 455, 463, 715, 1020, 1595), and *Physics* (Kibre 1936, nos. 439, 446, 455, 457, 464, 499, 514, 745). The catalogue contains two copies of an alleged commentary by Simplicius, *In secundum et tertium ethicorum* (Kibre 1936, nos. 446, 451), but as far as we know he wrote only one commentary on ethical matters, namely, a commentary on the *Manual* of Epictetus (see Hadot 1987, 39).

237 Themistius (ca. 317–388), a Peripatetic, politician, and commentator on Aristotle, was also to be found in Pico's library (Kibre 1936, no. 575).

238 Alexander of Aphrodisias was a master of Aristotelian philosophy in Athens between 198 and 211 and is known as the greatest commentator on Aristotle in ancient times. There are numerous works by Alexander among Pico's books (Kibre 1936, nos. 29, 510, 511, 617, 730, 1588, 1592, 1597).

239 Theophrastus (ca. 372–ca. 287 BC) was a philosopher and scientist, becoming Aristotle's successor in directing the Peripatetic school from 322 BC on. His works were found in Pico's library (Kibre 1936, nos. 450, 631, 1557).

240 Pico's stylistic considerations prevent his identification with Ammonius Saccas (175–252), an Alexandrian Neoplatonist who was the teacher of Origen and Plotinus. It is certain that "it was not Ammonius Saccas, or Ammonius, Plato's master, but Ammonius, the son of Hermias, a

scholar of Proclus" (Pignagnoli in Pico 1969, 121n117). Ammonius Hermiae (ca. 440–after 517) was head of the Neoplatonic School in Alexandria, commentator on Aristotle, and teacher of Asclepius, Damascius, Philoponus, and Simplicius.

241 Cf. *Conclusiones* 1.20.1–1.24.55 (Farmer 1998, 296–333). Together with the other Neoplatonic authors Plotinus, Porphyry, and Iamblichus, "there were numerous works by Proclus in Pico's library" (Carena in Pico 1994, 77n90).

242 Porphyry (234–ca. 305) was a Neoplatonic philosopher who sought to bring even greater precision to Plotinus.

243 Iamblichus (ca. 242–327) was a Neoplatonic philosopher who was a disciple of Porphyry and launched the Neoplatonic School in Syria: "His writings had a great influence on the Athenian School which arose during the following century under Plutarch [of Athens]" (Morrow in Proclus 1970, 19n). His thinking was essential to later Neoplatonic metaphysics.

244 Plotinus (205–270) is unanimously considered the chief representative of Neoplatonism. He was a pupil of Ammonius Saccas in Alexandria and, after the (presumed) death of his teacher, he settled in Rome, where he taught Porphyry.

245 Proclus (412–485), a Neoplatonic philosopher, joined the Neoplatonic School at Athens around 430 or 431 and studied under Plutarch of Athens and Syrianus, whom he succeeded as head of the school (ca. 437). In Proclus, there is a Neoplatonic synthesis of Aristotelian and Stoic elements.

246 Hermias (fifth century), a Neoplatonic philosopher, was a fellow disciple of Proclus in Athens at the school of Syrian the Great, but lived and taught in Alexandria.

247 Damascius (ca. 462–after 538), a Neoplatonic philosopher, sought to reinvigorate the Neoplatonists' reputation after the death of Proclus in 485.

He faced a sharp increase in Christianity, against which he hoped to apply philosophic reasoning.

248 Olympiodorus (before 510–after 565), a Neoplatonic philosopher and disciple of Ammonius in Alexandria, attained the chair of philosophy in about 541. Though many of his students were Christians, he never converted. Olympiodorus can be found in Pico's library (Kibre 1936, no. 1130).

249 Here the Palatino manuscript contains an addition, which Garin transcribes as "Sunt haec veritatis privilegia, ut vinci nesciat et coniecta contra spicula in auctores redeant" (Garin 1961, 239–40): "These are the privileges of truth: it cannot be conquered and the weapons used against it rebound against their authors." See also Boulnois and Tognon (in Pico 1993, 49n). Yet, for a slightly different *lectio*, see Marchignoli (in Bori 2000, 136, 157): "Sane hoc veritatis privilegio [it is truly by this privilege of truth], ut vinci nesciat et contorta in eam spicula in auctores redeant." At this point, the correspondence with the text of manuscript P is interrupted, to return in §193 and §268.

250 Cf. Plato, *Epistula* 7.341c–d.

251 The text of manuscript P reads: "In fact it is certain that all knowledge was passed down from the barbarians to the Greeks and from the Greeks to us"; see Marchignoli (in Bori 2000, 154). See also Diogenes Laertius, *Vitae philosophorum* 1.Proem.1. On Eudoxus and Hermippus, see §224. The origin of the doctrines of knowledge among the barbarians is also recalled by Eusebius's *Praeparatio evangelica* 9.10.1–7 and 14.10.4–5.

252 The text of manuscript P adds: "It is undoubtedly necessary to obtain the sacred knowledge and most secret mysteries in the first place from the Hebrews and the Chaldeans and then from the Greeks. The Arabians share with the Greeks all the other arts and the most diverse forms of philosophical knowledge. How could anyone who does not approach them be able to progress in this knowledge? However, since many of their books,

including the most valuable ones, have come down to us lacking any translation, and of those that have reached us the translators have distorted more things than they have rendered useful, obviously then a foggy obscurity has spread over everything so that what for the native readers was simple, clear and useful has become for us full of difficulties and contortions, hence evasive, immediately thwarting any attempt on the part of the scholars to understand it.” See Marchignoli (in Bori 2000, 155).

253 The commentators refer readers to *De vera religione* 3.3, but, as Reich notes, “an exact reference has *not* been documented” (in Pico 1968, 64n66). Reich refers readers rather to *De civitate Dei* [*City of God*] 8.11. See also *De civitate Dei* 9.1. The *De civitate Dei* was to be found among Pico’s books (Kibre 1936, no. 194) together with a commentary by Thomas Anglicus (Kibre 1936, no. 539), presumably Thomas Waleys O.P. (fl. 1314–1350). The work by Thomas Waleys, and its continuation by his Dominican confrere Nicholas Trevet, is one of the few, or perhaps the only, extended commentaries on Augustine’s *City of God* written in the Middle Ages.

254 Cf. Gellius 7.13.1–2; see Kibre (1936, no. 420).

255 Cf. *Conclusiones* 2.1.1–2.11.72 (Farmer 1998, 364–553) and §199. In fact, there are only 498 theses in the final edition of this second main section of the work, while there were originally 500. To compensate for this lack, however, there are 402 theses in the final draft of the first main section, while there were originally 400 (see Farmer 1998, 8).

256 Seneca, *Epistles* 33.7. See Kibre (1936, no. 995).

257 Cf. *Corpus Hermeticum* 2.17: “Prudent people therefore regard the making of children as a duty in life to be taken most seriously and greatly revered, and should any human being pass away childless, they see it as the worst misfortune and irreverence” (Hermes Trismegistus 1992).

258 Cf. *Conclusiones* 1.27.1–10 (Farmer 1998, 340–43). “Ancient theology” here translates the rather wider ranging Latin expression *prisca*

theologia. “Under the name of the (Egyptian god) Hermes Trismegistus numerous texts circulated, the contents of which were partly astrological and partly Platonist-Neopythagorean, presented as translations of ancient Egyptian texts. A corpus of 18 texts, which were probably collected in late antiquity in Neoplatonic circles, has been handed down. The *Corpus Hermeticum* was translated in 1471 by Ficino, who was strongly influenced by the mystic wisdom of these texts” (Reich in Pico 1968, 64n66).

259 Cf. *Conclusiones* 1.26.1–6 (Farmer 1998, 338–39). The name “Chaldea,” originally applied to the southernmost area of Mesopotamia, was later used to designate the entire Babylonian territory. The Chaldeans probably came from Arabia, and with the decline of Assyrian power a dynasty of Chaldean origin assumed power in Babylon (626 BC), holding it until the Persian invasion (529 BC). Farmer notes rightly that the “Chaldean” taught to Pico by Flavius Mithridates was in actual fact “Aramaic” (Farmer 1998, 3). The “Chaldean” texts Pico stated he had in a letter to Ficino in 1486 are quite probably the work, according to Farmer, of Mithridates’ forgery (Farmer 1998, 13, 486–87, and note).

260 Cf. *Conclusiones* 1.25.1–14 (Farmer 1998, 334–37); Pythagoras (sixth century BC) was a mysterious figure in Greek intellectual history. Religious reformer, mathematician, and inspired thaumaturge, he has been compared to Oriental shamans. On shamanic influences, see §193 and §222.

261 Cf. *Conclusiones* 1.28.1–47 (Farmer 1998, 344–63). Here Pico is referring to the doctrines of the Cabala.

262 Cf. again *Conclusiones* 2.1.1–2.11.72 (Farmer 1998, 364–553); in actual fact only 498 (see §196 and note 255).

263 Cf. *Conclusiones* 2.1.1–17 (Farmer 1998, 364–73). Unlike the authors cited, Pico expressly strove to demonstrate agreement between Plato and Aristotle. “The scholar from Mirandola claims to be the first to propose the *concordia* between the two greatest Greek philosophers ‘after many centuries’ [see §195],” Pignagnoli writes, and “the claim […] is true in the

sense that no one until then had dedicated any profound studies to the matter" (in Pico 1969, 123n123). This work, perhaps left unfinished, has not come down to us. However, Pico speaks explicitly of it in the *De ente et uno*, which according to Boulnois and Tognon "is undoubtedly a fragment of it" (in Pico 1993, 109n50). Like the *De ente et uno*, the *Concordia* was also ordered into ten parts to suggest "the importance of this Pythagorean *numerus numerorum*" ("number of numbers") (Farmer 1998, 30); cf. *Conclusiones* 2.9.23 (Farmer 1998, 502–3). Pico probably composed the *De ente et uno* "in 1491 as a preliminary sketch for the *Concord*" (Farmer 1998, 25).

264 Boethius, *Commentaries on Aristotle's De interpretatione* 2.3 (Boethius 1987, 2:80). See Kibre (1936, no. 119).

265 See Simplicius's proem to *In Aristotelis Categorias commentarium* and Kalbfleisch (in Simplicius 1907, 29–32). It is not present, however, in *In Aristotelis Physicorum libros commentaria* 8.5 (Arist. 258b4 [Diels and Kranz 1951–52, 2:1249, 12–13]) or *In Aristotelis De caelo commentaria* 3.7 (Arist. 306a1). For the presence of Simplicius among Pico's books, see §188 and note 236. A very similar judgment is directly expressed by Pico in a letter to Ermolao Barbaro of 6 December 1484 (Pico 1971, *Opera omnia* 1:368–69). See also Cicero, *Academica* 1.4.17–18.

266 Cf. *Contra Academicos* 3.19.42, in which Augustine refers to Cicero's *Academica* 1.17–18: "Non defuerunt acutissimi et sollertissimi viri qui docerent disputationibus suis Aristotelem ac Platonem ita sibi concinere, ut imperitis minusque attentis dissentire videantur" ("There have been acute and clever men who taught in their disputations that Aristotle and Plato in such wise agree with one another that those who are unskilled or examine the matter cursorily think that they disagree," Augustine of Hippo 1950).

267 John Philoponus (ca. 490–570) was "a Christian philosopher and theologian, disciple of Ammonius Hermiae in Alexandria"; *philoponos*, or "lover of work," "is the name given to the members of certain ascetic associations" (Faggin 1957, 2:758). Reich's supposition that the reference should have been to "John Garland, who lived from about 1190 to 1260/70,

a grammarian, lexicographer, musicologist and pedagogue" (in Pico 1968, 66n72) is highly unlikely. Some of Philoponus's works can be found in Pico's library (Kibre 1936, nos. 449, 1131).

268 Cf. *De vita Aristotelis* 23–25 (Aristotle 1967, 438).

269 Cf., in particular, *Conclusiones* 1.2–9, 14, and 17 (Farmer 1998, 366–71).

270 Cf., in particular, *Conclusiones* 1.15–16 (Farmer 1998, 370–71).

271 Cf. *Conclusiones* 2.2.1–80: "Eighty philosophical conclusions according to my own opinion, which while dissenting from the common philosophy, do not depart radically from the common method of philosophizing" (Farmer 1998, 372–97). In these theses, too, according to Farmer, Pico "resolves numerous standard scholastic conflicts" (Farmer 1998, 206).

272 They are the "*Conclusiones paradoxae secundum opinionem propria nova in philosophia dogmata inducentes*" ("Paradoxical conclusions according to his own opinion, leading to new philosophical dogmas"): *Conclusiones* 2.3.1–71. In the *editio princeps*, however, they are indicated as 71 (*numero lxxi*); see Farmer (1998, 398–421). This discrepancy in numbering can be explained by the changes Pico carried out "shortly before, and apparently while, the work was in press" (Farmer 1998, 183). A "faulty cross-referencing" shows also that "one from his 'paradoxical conclusions introducing new doctrines into philosophy' [was] excluded" in the final draft (Farmer 1998, 461). The fourth of the "*Conclusiones magicae* […] *secundum opinionem propriam*" ("Magical conclusions according to my own opinion [9.4]") in fact reads: *ex ista conclusione et conclusione paradoxa dogmatizante .xlvii. sequitur* … ("from that conclusion and the forty-seventh paradoxical conclusion, it follows …") (Farmer 1998, 495), but the reference in 9.4 is actually to the forty-sixth "paradoxical dogmatizing conclusion" (Farmer 1998, 495, note). According to Farmer, the thesis was deleted "almost surely for theological reasons" (Farmer 1998,

18n49). These "seventy-two" theses, or the remaining seventy-one, make up the *philosophia nova* ("new philosophy") that Pico intended to introduce.

273 Farmer points out that "historians have routinely bypassed this passage," in which Pico expressly states that he wishes to introduce a new philosophy (*novam afferre velle philosophiam*), whereas it should be obvious, in his opinion, that in this "key" passage Pico "underscored the importance" of the very part of the nine hundred theses in which his intention directly took shape (Farmer 1998, 18).

274 "Marsilius Ficinus cites in the *Platonica theologia* a certain number of 'ancient theologians'" (Boulnois and Tognon in Pico 1993, 55n21); cf. Marsilio Ficino, *Theologia Platonica de immortalitate animorum* 6.1 (Marcel in Ficino 1964–70, 1:224). Pignagnoli (in Pico 1969, 127n130) observes that "for *prisca theologia* (or *theologia priscorum*), Ficino meant thoughts about the 'divine' contained in the *Corpus Hermeticum* [see §199 and note 258] and, prior to this, the wisdom of Zoroaster contained in the *Chaldean Oracles*." See §137, §230 and note 314.

275 E. Wellmann describes Aglaophamos as "the presumed Orphic master of Pythagoras, from whom he is thought to have received his initiation in Thrace." See Iamblichus, *De vita Pythagorica* 146; Kibre (1936, no. 844). See also Aristotle, *Metaphysica* 1.5 (985b23–986a3).

276 Philolaus (ca. 470–385 BC), "a contemporary of Socrates and Democritus," member of the Pythagorean school and "the first to make his doctrine known by means of an ample exposition of it [in his Περὶ φύσεως ("On Nature")], of which numerous fragments remain" (Pozzo 1957, 2:390).

277 Cf. Proclus, *In primum Euclidis Elementorum libri commentarii*, Prologue 1; *Theologia Platonica* 1.5; Iamblichus, *De vita Pythagorica* 146 (Iamblichus 1975, 60, 1–9). It is not present in Aristotle's *Metaphysica* 1.5 (985b23–986a3).

278 Cf. Plato, *Epinomis* 976c–e. The *Epinomis* belongs to a set of works that were ascribed to Plato in antiquity; however, their authenticity has come into doubt in the modern period. *Alcibiades I* and *II* also belong to this set of works (see §35). "The *Epinomis* is thought by some scholars to be the work of Philip of Opus; but, if it is Plato's, it certainly belongs to his late period" (Kraut 1997, 389). According to Cicognani, however, the dialogue "already attributed by many, following Diogenes Laertius (3.37), to Philip of Opus, a direct follower of Plato, is nowadays held to be authentic by the most authoritative critics" (in Pico 1941, 118n65).

279 Aristotle, *Problemata* 30.6 (956a11–13).

280 Abu Mashar (787–886), a Persian astronomer and astrologer "known mainly in western Europe as Albumazar, who studied in Baghdad and was a contemporary of the famous philosopher Al-Kindi (first half of ninth century); after having studied Islamic traditions, he mainly dedicated himself to the study of astronomy and astrology, and it is to the latter discipline that he owes his renown" (Millas 1954–, 143). Abu Mashar "is one of the most famous medieval astrologers, above all thanks to the great influence he had in the West," where he became "the principal author on whose works astrology was studied" (Kunitzsch 1977–98).

281 "Who this Babylonian Avenzoar may be," writes Cicognani, "I have no means of knowing." Thus, in his opinion, Pico must have considered this Avenzoar "Babylonian" "to distinguish him from Avenzoar of Seville, a famous physician, the first of the Arabs to allow tracheotomy" (in Pico 1941, 119n67). The latter, also called by the Latins Abumaron or Abhomaron, was considered by Averroes, "his friend and adviser," the "greatest doctor since the time of Galen." Abumaron, or more precisely Abu Marwan ibn Zuhr (ca. 1094–1162), was the "most important representative of a family of doctors, who for six generations practised this profession in the Arabian-Hispanic world" (Lauer 1977–98). Pico considers his opinions in the nine hundred theses (see *Conclusiones secundum Abumaron Babylonium numero .iiii.* ["Four conclusions according to Abumaron the Babylonian"] 1.11.1–4; Farmer 1998, 274–75) and "is probably drawing here from Averroes' discussions of Ibn Zuhr, although he

could also be approached through a Latin translation of his *Taysir*, his most famous medical work.” In fact, “the first printed edition of that text, which appeared in 1490/91, found its way into Pico’s library” (Farmer 1998, 274, note). See Kibre (1936, 103–4). In the *Conclusiones*, Pico for some reason calls Abumaron “Babylonian,” but the incongruence of his words reported by Abumasar, who was a contemporary of Al-Kindi and lived far earlier, remains. Cicognani, however, finds it “fruitless to examine the Latin versions of Abumasar’s work” and states that “perhaps Avenzoar, in Pico’s text, is a mistake” (in Pico 1941, 119).

282 Plato, *Republic* 525b–c.

283 Pico here alludes to the *Questiones ad quas pollicetur se per numeros responsurum* (“Questions to which he promises to respond through numbers”) 2.7a.1–74 (Farmer 1998, 470–85), seventy-four in number, which are included among the *Conclusiones de mathematicis secundum opinionem propriam numero .lxxxv.* (“Eighty-five conclusions on mathematics according to my own opinion”) 2.7.1–11, 2.7a.1–74 (Farmer 1998, 466–85).

284 Cf. *Conclusiones* 2.9.1–26 (Farmer 1998, 494–503) and 2.10.1–31 (Farmer 1998, 504–15).

285 For the distinction between γοητεία (*goêteia*) and μαγεία (*mageia*), see the *Suda*: “Magic [μαγεία] is the invocation of beneficent spirits for the production of something good; like the oracles of Apollonius of Tyana. Sorcery [γοητεία] is the invocation of maleficent spirits which takes place around the graves” (Roth 2002). From here until §231, Pico refers to γοητεία (*goêteia*) and μαγεία (*mageia*) as the “former” and the “latter,” respectively.

286 Porphyry, *De abstinentia* 4.16.1. See also Apuleius, *Apologia* 25.9; Kibre (1936, no. 656).

287 As Bausi points out, the term *disparilitas*, used here by Pico in the expression *disparilitas et dissimilitudo* ("difference and disparity"), "was to be found already in the letter to Barbaro" (Bausi 1996, 124). The terms *dissimilitudo*, *diversitas* ("difference, diversity") are found in Gellius, Macrobius, Apuleius, Calcidius, and the Christian authors, but also in Barbarus, *Temistio*, fol. 114r. Besides occurring in the *Oration*, it returns "in the *Heptaplus*, p. 190 Garin (*disparilitas conditionis*); and it moreover recurs in the preface to the first *Miscellanea* by Angelo Poliziano. […] Synonymic diphthology with *dissimilitudo* is found also in Aug. *Epist*. 120.12" (Bausi 1996, 38).

288 Cf. Pliny, *Natural History* 30.1: "eo ipso quod fraudolentissima artium plurimum in toto terrarum orbe plurimisque saeculis valuit" ("were it only because the most fraudulent of arts has held complete sway throughout the world for many ages," Jones trans.); 30.2: "natam primum e medicina nemo dubitabit ac specie salutari inrepsisse velut altiorem sanctioremque medicinam" ("Nobody will doubt that it first arose from medicine, and that professing to promote health it insidiously advanced under the disguise of a higher and holier system," Pliny the Elder 1967–70, Jones trans.); see Kibre (1936, no. 913). As Boulnois and Tognon point out, "these are the theses extensively developed by Pico in his *Disputationes adversus astrologiam divinatricem*, which clearly distinguish for the first time mathematical *astronomy* from divining *astrology*" (Pico 1993, 57n22). Compare the proem of the *Disputationes adversus astrologiam divinatricem*: "And when I say astrology, I do not mean that which measures the size and motion of the stars with a mathematical method, a certain and noble art, full of dignity for its merits, widely supported by the authority of highly learned men, but that which foresees the future from the course of the stars, a deceitful speculation, forbidden by religious and civil laws, maintained by the curiosity of men, derided by philosophers, supported by charlatans, suspect to all good people and to all wise men" (Pico 1971, 1:412; Pico 1946–52, 1:1–9, 40).

289 Cf. Pliny's *Natural History* 30.8: "quamquam animadverto summam litterarum claritatem gloriamque ex ea scientia antiquitus et paene semper petitam" ("and yet I notice that of old, in fact almost always, the highest

literary distinction and renown have been sought from that science," Pliny the Elder 1967–70, Jones trans.).

290 Empedocles (492–432 BC), "the last of the great naturalist philosophers of the 5th Century," "led a life of wandering; if the diverse aspects of his life are described as 'orator – physician – priest – magician', this is precisely what is meant: that he tried to heal, order and conciliate" (Dörrie 1964–75b, "Empedocles").

291 Democritus (ca. 460–ca. 370 BC) "was one of the main representatives of ancient atomism, which he had learnt from Leucippus" (Bodnár 1996–, "Democritus"). "According to one of his own accounts, kept for us by Clement of Alexandria (*Str*. 1.69), he made very long journeys, as no other of his time: he thus had the occasion to know the Babylonians and the Egyptians" (Dörrie 1964–75a, "Democritus"). However, according to Bodnár (1996–, 3:455), "the great travels attributed to Democritus allude to nothing but the encyclopaedic vastness of his work" (cf. Diels and Kranz 1951–52, 68B64 and B65).

292 Cf. Pliny, *Natural History* 30.2: "Certe Pythagoras, Empedocles, Democritus, Plato ad hanc discendam navigavere exiliis verius quam peregrinationibus susceptis, hanc reversi praedicavere, hanc in arcanis habuere" ("Certainly Pythagoras, Empedocles, Democritus and Plato went overseas to learn it, going into exile rather than on a journey, taught it openly on their return, and considered it one of their most treasured secrets," Pliny the Elder 1967–70, Jones trans.). On the travels to the East attributed to the Greek sages, see further Iamblichus, *De mysteriis* 1.1: "For it would not be becoming that Pythagoras, Plato, Demokritos, Eudoxos, and many others of the Old Greeks, should have obtained competent instruction from the temple-scribes of their own time, but that thou [Porphyry] who art contemporary with us, and having the same disposition as they, should be turned away by those now living and recognized as public teachers" (Iamblichus 1911).

293 As for Zalmoxis, Griffiths writes: "According to Herodotus (4.94–6), a God of the Getae in Thrace ('also called Gebeleizis') who promised

immortality to his devotees […]. Also offered is an alternative, euphemistic version, in which Zalmoxis was a charlatan who imported ideas picked up from Pythagoras, whose slave he had been" (Griffiths 2003b, "Zalmoxis," 1633). More extensively, Dodds observes: "We know at any rate that Pythagoras founded a kind of religious order, a community of men and women whose rule of life was determined by the expectation of lives to come. Possibly there were precedents of a sort even for that: we may remember the Thracian Zalmoxis in Herodotus, who assembled 'the best of the citizens' and announced to them, *not* that the human soul is immortal, but that *they and their descendants* were going to live forever – they were apparently chosen persons, a sort of spiritual élite. That there was some analogy between Zalmoxis and Pythagoras must have struck the Greek settlers in Thrace, from whom Herodotus heard the story, for they made Zalmoxis into Pythagoras' slave. That was absurd, as Herodotus saw: the real Zalmoxis was a daemon, possibly a heroised shaman of the distant past. But the analogy was not so absurd: did not Pythagoras promise his followers that they should live again, and become at least daemons or even gods?" (Dodds 1951, 144).

294 Abaris is known for being "the priest of Apollo the Hyperborean and a shaman like Aristeas of Proconnesus" (Des Places in Porphyre 1982, 49, 153). In the *Charmides*, Plato associates him with Zalmoxis (Plato, *Charmides* 158b). In his commentary on the passage in Plato, Alfred Croiset refers readers to the information Herodotus gives of him: "Abaris is a semi-legendary figure, a sort of thaumaturge, to whom was attributed, among his other works, a poem about Apollo among the Hyperboreans. According to Herodotus (4.36), he was a priest of Apollo. It was narrated that he had travelled around the Earth without eating, carrying with him the whole time an arrow that Apollo had given him as a sign of his devotion" (Plato 1921, 58–59n3); cf. Herodotus, *Historiae* 4.36.1.

295 Cf. Pliny, *Natural History* 30.3. Zoroaster, who was "the creator of the highly influential theological and moral system which was Iranian dualism," remains, however, for us "a hazy figure in an imprecise past time" (Bidez and Cumont 1938, 1:v). "The most ancient information that has been passed down to us about Zoroaster came from the early Greek

historians of Asia Minor, the main one of whom was Xanthos the Lydian, who wrote in the 5th century, before Herodotus" (Bidez and Cumont 1938, 5). Diodorus Siculus (*Bibliotheca historica* 1.94.2) records that "Zathraustes" received the laws of the "Benign Spirit." "It is now admitted that this prophet lived at the beginning of the sixth century BC. He was an Iranian from the northeast, and the cradle of his preaching was 'the Arian region' during the reign of King Vishtaspa (Hystapes for the Greeks), north of Sogdiana (see Varenne 1966). The term *Arianois* is, therefore, quite correct as this region had not yet been conquered by Cyrus and was neither Median nor Persian. The 'Benign Spirit' is Ahoura Mazda, god of light, who abducted Zarathustra in ecstasy in order to dictate his laws to him" (Diodorus Siculus 1993, 173n1). On Ahoura-Mazda, see also p. 235 n. 297.

296 Cf. Pliny, *Natural History* 30.8: "diligentiores paulo ante hunc [Osthanen] ponunt Zoroastrem alium Proconnensium" ("A little before Osthanes, the more careful inquirers place another Zoroaster, a native of Proconnesus," Jones trans. in Pliny 1967–70). This should be Aristeas of Proconnesus according to Diels and Kranz (1951–52, 217, 68 [55] B 300, 13), yet cf. Pliny, *Natural History* 30.3: "Sine dubio illic orta in Perside a Zoroastre, ut inter auctores convenit. Sed unus hic fuerit an postea et alius, non satis constat" ("Without doubt magic arose in Persia with Zoroaster. On this our authorities are agreed, but whether he was the only one of that name, or whether there was also another afterwards, is not clear," Jones trans. in Pliny 1967–70). (See Bidez and Cumont 1938, 2:13n18.) Aristeas is, "like Abaris and Zalmoxis, a legendary wisdom-figure associated with the cult of Apollo, reflecting early Greek contacts with Scythian culture" (Griffiths 2003a, "Aristeas," 159). On the legend of Aristeas, whose "capacity to disappear and reappear, and whose presence at the same time in different places, made him similar […] to other 'magicians'" (Aldo Corcella in Herodotus 1991–, 4:240), see Herodotus, *Historiae* 4.13–15.

297 Cf. Apuleius, *Apologia* 26.1–2. In Zoroastrianism, Oromazes, or "Ahoura-Mazda," is the god of Good, "the supreme, omniscient, omnipresent god, standing well above other divine mights; he is, as an inscription in Persepolis says, 'the creator of this earth, the creator of

heaven, the creator of man'" (Bidez and Cumont 1938, 1:v). See Diogenes Laertius, *Vitae philosophorum* 1.Proem.8.

298 Plato, *Alcibiades* I 121e–122a. The passage from Plato is quoted by Apuleius in a place quite probably known to Pico; see §216 (and note 286) and *Apologia* 25.10–11.

299 Plato, *Charmides* 156c–157a.

300 Cf. Apuleius, *Apologia* 90.6. According to Reich, the *Charondas* cited by Pico is nothing but the *Carmendas* from Apuleius's text, which at this point, moreover, turns out to be highly corrupt. He observes that "both the mss. in the Biblioteca Laurenziana report the abbreviation *carm̄das*, which explains Pico's 'erroneous' form." In Reich's opinion, therefore, "*Carondas* means, as is found in Apuleius' testimony, the magician *Carmendas*, whose name Pliny (*Natural History* 30.5) hands down more correctly as *Tarmoendas*"; Pliny "includes him among the magicians *quorum nulla extant monumenta*" (in Pico 1968, 72n83). However, "*Tarmoendas* is also mentioned only once by Pliny" and, according to the interesting conjecture by Adam Abt, "because of the way the name is recorded in the codex, it signifies that this is the first time it has been seen," and the name *Carmendas* is "like a rhetorical name: *qui carmen dat*" (Apuleius 1908, 319). Also according to Butler and Owen (Apuleius 1914, 162), the name *Carmendas* "would not be an unnatural name for a magician, qui carmen dat" and, as Vincent Hunink points out, "in the latter variant, it may well have been the surname of any great magician" (Apuleius 1997, 2:223). Cf. Pliny, *Natural History* 30.5. However, Iamblichus includes *Charondas* among the first followers of Pythagoras (see §222).

301 Damigeron is the presumed author of a work of Greek origin (second century AD) on the properties of the stones, whose content is similar to that of the pseudo-Zoroaster used by Pliny (*Natural History* 37.139–85).

302 Apollonius is the renowned Apollonius of Tyana, of whom the Athenian Philostratus wrote a biography dedicated to the Empress Julia

(before 217, the date of her death).

303 “Several texts on magic, which recalled *Zarathustra* [Zoroaster] circulated bearing the name of *Hostanes*, or *Osthanes*” (Reich in Pico 1968, 72n83); “the *Oktateuchos*, a book on magic that was widespread in the first centuries of Christianity, was attributed to him.” Osthanes is cited several times by Pliny: see *Natural History* 28.6.69 and 256; 30.8.11 and 14. The *Suda* speaks of a “guild or society” of magicians called *Ostanai* (Butler and Owen in Apuleius 1914, 163). The reference to Zoroaster is taken from Diogenes Laertius, to whom the compiler clearly refers; see Diogenes Laertius, *Vitae philosophorum* 1.Proem.2. From this testimony, Osthanes can be considered “the most famous” of the magicians who were “heirs to the knowledge” of Zoroaster (Bidez and Cumont 1938, 1:vi). Moreover, “Democritus was thought when visiting Mendes [a city in the northwestern district of the the Nile delta, so called from the name of the major god worshipped there] to have been a pupil of Ostanes, a Persian sage, who became a legendary figure credited with a corpus of medical and magical lore, *DK* [Diels and Kranz] ii, 210 ff” (Whittaker in Tatian 1982, 35, note *a*). Ostanes also appears in a Gnostic script cited by Hippolytus which speaks of certain divine powers and of men endowed with particular faculties generated in their image. See Hippolytus, *Refutatio omnium haeresium* 5.14.8.

304 Dardanus is “the mythical ancestor of the Trojans to whom were ascribed the introduction of the Samothracian mysteries and the invention of magic. […] According to Fulgentius he was the author of *dimanera*. […] Pliny relates that Democritus recovered his writings from his grave. Among the Christian authors, Arnobius, Clement of Alexandria and Eusebius mention him” (Waszink in Tertullian 1947, 576). See Pliny, *Natural History* 30.9; Clemens Alexandrinus, *Proptrepticus* 2.13.3.

305 “The *Poetic Theology* is mentioned in the *Commento* [*sopra una canzona de amore*] … and in parallel sections of the *Oration* and *Apology* (*Opera* 121, 327; Garin, Scritti vari, 150). Scattered evidence survives that would permit a detailed reconstruction of Pico’s methods in his *Poetic Theology*, which unlike earlier Renaissance works in that genre (like

Boccaccio’s *Genealogia deorum*) was motivated by highly systematic goals” (Farmer 1998, 70n35). These are Pico’s own words: “The sense of which, although it may be subtle and lofty, nevertheless conforms to things so well that it almost seems a wonder to me that both Marsilius and others, captured by the words of Plato, did not understand it; and witness to this is my awareness of it the first time I ever read the *Symposium*: no sooner had I finished reading his words in this place, than this truth appeared to my mind, which in our commentary on the *Convivium* and in our *Poetic Theology* we shall in fact explain more fully” (*Commento*, fourth stanza).

306 Cf. Pliny, *Natural History* 30.3–4. As for Aristotle, Gigante points out (in Diogenes Laertius 1976, 2:458n26) that “a precise comparison with Pliny has been carried out by W. Jaeger”; the latter writes that Aristotle, “considering the wisdom of the Egyptians and the Iranian religion, rather than being perplexed in the face of their uncertain antiquity, attempted to obtain a calculation of the years as precisely as possible” (Jaeger 1923, 131). Eudoxus (ca. 391–ca. 38 BC) was a “mathematician, astronomer, geographer, and philosopher associated with Plato’s Academy and subsequently head of his own school in Cnidus.” Diogenes Laertius “tells us that he studied geometry with Archytas [VIII. viii. 86] [and] perhaps it is for this reason that Diogenes lists him among the Pythagoreans [VIII. viii. 91]” (Dancy 1997, 236). G. L. Huxley stresses “the importance of his doctrine of proportion [and observes that it lay] in its power to embrace incommensurable quantities […], for it amounts to a rigorous definition of real number” (Huxley 1970–80, 4:466). Eudoxus carried out long journeys in Asia and “spent more than a year in Egypt, some of the time in the company of the priests in Helopolis [and he] was said to have composed his Oktaeteris, or eight-year calendric cycle, during his sojourn with them” (Huxley 1970–80, 4:466). According to Le Bonniec, Hermippus of Smyrna (fl. third century BC), a follower of Callimachus who “wrote biographies of philosophers, writers and legislators,” was “a compiler belonging to the Peripatetic School” (in Arnobius 1982, 353). Hermippus was certainly “called ‘the Callimachean’ or ‘the Peripatetic’ [but] at that time the epithet described someone erudite in the field of literature or biography, without necessarily implying any connection with the Peripatetic School” (Montanari 1996–, 5:439). Hermippus wrote two works, *On the Seven Sages* and *On Pythagoras*, and “was the author in about the year 200 of a

book *Peri Magôn* / Περὶ μάγων, which gave Pliny – through Apion – and almost at the same time Diogenes Laertius, a series of extracts with bibliographical references of capital importance. If Hermippus has transmitted to us so many valuable indications about Zoroaster and his work, it is with the detachment of a collector of texts who worked separated from the clamour and preoccupations of the world, in front of the shelves of books in the Museum in Alexandria. As far as Zoroaster is concerned, this erudite compiler tries to do nothing but be as exhaustive, precise and objective as possible" (Bidez and Cumont 1938, 1:21–22).

307 Al-Kindi (ca. 800–ca. 873) "was the first outstanding Arabic-writing philosopher [and] he appears to have been the first to introduce the late Greek syllabus of philosophical learning into the Muslim world. [This curriculum] was mainly, though not exclusively, based on the *Corpus Aristotelicum* and its Peripatetic and Neoplatonic commentators. [Al-Kindi] had a distinguished position at the Caliph's court in Baghdad [and] for about a century he enjoyed a reputation as a great philosopher in the Aristotelian-Neoplatonic tradition" (Walzer 1967, 4:340). "One of the items for which no title is given in the inventories" of Pico's library is "possibly Alkindi's treatise on *Magic Arts*" (Kibre 1936, 93; see no. 982 of the catalogue).

308 Interests in operative natural magic were shared also by Roger Bacon (1214/20–1292) (Wolter 1967, 1:240–41). "By Roger Bacon, whom Pico termed a great patron of astrology [*Rogerius Bacon magnus astrologiae patronus*; see *Disputationes in astrologiam* in Pico 1971, *Opera omnia* 1:419, 490] was the *Letter on Secret Works of Art and Nature and on the Nullity of Magic*" kept in his library (Kibre 1936, 93–94; see no. 422 of the catalogue).

309 The influence of the doctrines of natural magic transmitted by the Arabs is seen also in William of Auvergne or of Paris (ca. 1180–1249), "French theologian and philosopher [who] taught theology at Paris, and was consecrated bishop of the city." William also belongs to "the first generation of Paris masters to make a wide use of Aristotelian, Islamic, and Jewish thought"; he may be considered "the first great master of the new

age [and] the first thinker to use with courage and insight the rediscovered riches of Aristotle" (Knowles 1967, 8:302–3). However, "there is moreover in his works a dramatically non-Aristotelian notion of experience that harked back to Arabic and Hebrew lore on magic and the occult. The real 'experimenters' were for him natural magicians, whose ability to manipulate hidden forces in the natural world held out the promise of marvellous accomplishments." This aspect of William's work also constitutes "a theme of major importance for later scholastic thought, picked up with fervour by Roger Bacon and many of the so-called Perspectivists" (Marrone 1998, 9:726–27). In Pico's library "there was the *De universo* by William of Auvergne, in which he treated of magic" (Kibre 1936, 93; see no. 620 of the catalogue). In the *Apologia* (Pico 1971, 1:169), Pico explicitly refers to William's *De universo*: *De hac ut dixi tractat Guilielmus Parisiensis in suo de universo corporali et spirituali* (Kibre 1936, 93n42).

310 Cf. Plotinus, *Enneades* 4.21.40. "Friendship" (*philia* / φιλία, or more precisely *philotês* / φιλότης) and "discord" (*neikos* / νεῖκος) are terms introduced by Empedocles (see, e.g., frag. B 17, 16–20 in Diels and Kranz 1951–52, and §85). For the use of the expression *sympatheia*, see §230. According to Armstrong, this passage "and the following chapters make clear that magic was for Plotinus a manipulation of natural forces, attractions and sympathies resulting from the living organic unity of the physical universe [and that] his interest in it was philosophical rather than practical" (in Plotinus 1966–88, 4:260n1). It is significant to note that the *Theologia Aristotelis*, which follows in this point (6.13) the text by Plotinus, expands it, making the distinction Pico insists on explicit: "*Now the works that arise from sorcery and magic occur in two ways, either by sympathy and the concord of similar things, or by opposition and variance through the plurality and variance of the faculties. But though they vary they complete the one living thing. Often things happen without anybody's having performed any trick at all.* The artificial magic is falsehood, for it is all mistaken and does not hit the mark. *The true magic*, which is not mistaken and does not play false, *is the magic of the universe, which is love and mastery. The wise magician is the one who assimilates himself to the universe* and practises its works in accordance with his capability, for he makes use of love in one place and makes use of mastery in another place"

(in Plotinus 1966–88, 4:13–16; the parts in italics are those corresponding to the Greek text).

311 Cf. Porphyry, *Vita Plotini* 10.33–38; see Kibre (1936, no. 1668).

312 Cf. Pliny, *Natural History* 20.1 and 37.59.

313 The traditional Latin text here reads *cognitionem*, but Bausi (Pico 2003, 192) suggests on good grounds the emendation *cognationem* ("affinity or kinship"), which matches the term συγγένειαν used by Synesius in *De insomniis* 2.2, the passage upon which Pico most likely relied.

314 Cf. Pape (1914, s.v. *iügx*): "the wryneck [or wagtail], a small bird, which takes its name from its cry (*iuzô* / ἰύζω). Tied and made to turn on a metal circle, or on a wheel, it was considered by the witches of antiquity an effective love philtre (*philtron* / φίλτρον), particularly to bring back an unfaithful lover." Thus also *Scholia in Theocritum vetera* 2.17. It is in its metaphorical sense that *iügx* / ἴϋγξ is used in fragment 223 of the *Chaldean Oracles* (Des Places 1971, 120), where "the *iügges* / ἴϋγγες play a very important role" (Reich in Pico 1968, 74n90). For the *Chaldean Oracles*, see §199 and note 259. In the *Chaldean Oracles*, therefore, the *iynges* can be conceived of as "noetic powers" (Lewy 1956, 132), which may be interpreted at different times as psychic faculties, or divine powers, that exercise the "function […] of a magical mediation between the Supreme God and the invoking theurgist" (Lewy 1956, 250). According to Lewy, the *iynges* "are, consequently, the thoughts of the Supreme Being: thinking through circular motion" (Lewy 1956, 132) and "besides their theurgical, they have also a cosmic function" (Lewy 1956, 135), for they are also "astral intelligences" or divinities (Lewy 1956, 137), which "form a triad with the connective gods [*sunocheis*] and the teletarchic gods" (Des Places 1971, 86, n1 to frag. 76), whose name literally means "lords of initiation" (Des Places 1971, 198n1). The procession of the *iynges* before the Father, according to the doctrine of the *Chaldean Oracles*, is summed up by Psellus (*Hypotyposis* 2–5 in Des Places 1971, 198, 4–19). According to Antelme-Édouard Chaignet, "the *iügges* of Damascius and of the Chaldeans" must be

“nothing but systems of abstract ideas” (in Damascius 1964, 2:250 and note). Moreover, Lewy observes that “as the world is ruled by noetic entities, the ways of communicating with them are also conceived of as noetic [and] for this reason, the Chaldæans regard the science of treating of the cognition of the intelligible world as being of basic significance,” so “[t]his central theme of Chaldæan theosophy […] was of particular interest to the Neoplatonists” (Lewy 1956, 165). According to Des Places, it may be said that “the role of intermediaries, which Plato attributes to the demons, is in the *Oracles* that of the *iynges*.” According to Bausi, Pico uses the term in the sense of magic words, formulas or, more generally, as spells or charms, and “in this regard depends on Synesius, *De insomniis* [2.2]” (Pico 2003, 114–15). Davide Susanetti, commenting on this passage of Synesius, sums it up well: “There are three meanings of *iügx*: it is the name of a bird, of an instrument of erotic magic, and of a witch.” He adds that “in the Chaldean system the *iynges* are not material instruments, but noetic entities […], thought of the paternal intellect […], magical names, identical to the thoughts of the father […], intermediaries between him and men; words and formulae that may not be pronounced and which god himself gave to men to permit them to practise sacred rites and theurgical elevation” (in Synesius 1992, 96–97).

315 Cf. Horace, *Epodes* 2.9–10 and *Epistles* 1.16.3; Vergil, *Georgics* 1.2 and *Eclogues* 2.70; Ovid, *Metamorphoses* 10.100; Columella, *De re rustica* 11.2.79.

316 Cf. Ficino, *Comentarium in Convivium Platonis de amore* 6.10, and Pico, *Conclusiones* 2.9.13 (Farmer 1998, 498), and, furthermore, *Conclusiones* 2.9.5 (Farmer 1998, 496) and 2.9.11 (Farmer 1998, 498).

317 Isaiah 6:3: “plena est omnis terra gloria eius” (“all the earth is full of his glory”); cf. Hab. 3:3: “operuit caelos gloria eius, et laudis eius plena est terra” (“His glory covered the heavens, and the earth is full of his praise”). The phrase “Pleni sunt caeli et terra gloria majestatis tuae” (“The heavens and earth are filled with the glory of Thy majesty”) appears as a chorus for the mass of the first Sunday during Advent in St. Germain’s Hispanic-Mozarabic Missal (*PL* 72.423a). It became a normal part of the Sanctus of

the mass and was repeated numerous times by St. Gregory, Alcuin, Rabanus Maurus, St. Bernard of Clairvaux, and others.

318 Cf. *Heptaplus* 7.

319 The part of the *Oration* devoted to Jewish tradition corresponds to the last section of Pico's *Conclusiones*, which contains his cabalistic theses.

320 For the phrase "our own," see §186.

321 See §250 and 4 Esd. 14:3–6. The so-called Books of Esdras (in the Protestant tradition 1 Esdras and 2 Esdras) are considered apocryphal. 1 Esdras belongs to the biblical canon of the Catholic Church, Eastern Orthodoxy, and Oriental Orthodoxy. It is not included in the Protestant Bible and Hebrew Tanakh. 2 Esdras is considered a Jewish apocalypse. It is preserved in the biblical canon of the Ethiopian and Russian churches. For many Christian groups it belongs to apocryphal literature. The early Hebrew and Greek versions are lost, but they circulated in different translations. 2 Esdras was published as an appendix in the Latin Vulgate edited under Pope Clement VIII.

322 Hilary, *Tractatus in psalmos* 2.2 (*PL* 9.262–63). According to Bausi, this sentence is quoted also in the "*Apologia*, 5, in *Commentationes*, f. EE 4.5; *Opere complete*, 7, 20" (Pico 2003, 118).

323 Origen, *Commentary on John* 19.296–97 and *PG* 14.552–53. Cf. "*Apologia*, V (*Commentationes*, f. EE iii *v* – iiii *r* = *Opere complete*, VII 18)" (Pico 2003, 124). See also *De principiis* 2.12; *Heptaplus*, proem, 12.

324 The "books of Moses" are the first five books of the Hebrew Bible, so called because their authorship was attributed to Moses. They are called in Hebrew "*hummach*" or "Pentateuch" from the Greek, and comprise Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy. See *Conclusiones* 1.28.16 (Farmer 1998, 352–53) and *Heptaplus*, proem 2.7.

325 Cf. *Conclusiones* 1.28.33 (Farmer 1998, 358–59) and 2.11.49 (Farmer 1998, 540–41). This is an allusion to oral tradition and therefore to the Cabala as the true revelation received by Moses on the Mount. See 2 Esdras. In the episode of Zerubbabel, truth is defined as the primary force of the universe. See also *Sefer ha-Bahir* 1.137–8: the "Torah of Truth" revealed to Moses.

326 *Jesu Nave* is Joshua, son of Nun, who became the leader of Israel after the death of Moses, according to the narratives in Num. 27:18 and Deut. 34:9. Cf. Jos. 1:1; Sir. 46:1 (Pico 2003, 119). Part of the tradition of wisdom literature, its principal thesis is that wisdom is identified as the Law, revealed only to the God-fearing, who obey the commandments. The name Jesus translates the Hebrew name Yehoshua, whose root bears the meaning of "salvation." In the Christian canon (Luke 3:29; Col. 4:11), two other men appear with this name, translated as "YHWH is salvation." Several of Pico's cabalistic conclusions seek to prove this meaning to demonstrate the fulfilment of Christian dogma by which Jesus was the Son of God.

327 These are the *kohanim*, direct descendants of Aaron the high priest, brother of Moses. See also §141, "sacerdoti summo Michaeli" in reference to the archangel, whose name in Hebrew translates as "Who is like God?" (Num. 13:13; Dan. 10:13). Pico identifies Michael with the sefirah Keter (Crown), which he interprets as the symbol of the priesthood, itself a reference to the cabalists, who are thus the spiritual descendants of Jesu Nave (Sirach).

328 Cf. *Conclusiones* 1.28.3.

329 Cf. Sirach 24. Most of these notions (divine retribution and mercy, the mysteries of the universe, etc.) are contained in the work. Later Greek versions, as well as the Latin Ecclesiasticus, also mention the origin of sin, the afterlife, and other matters related to the Christian dogmas, which Pico mentions in §254. See Origen, *De principiis* 3.14 (Sir. 16:21). See also Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite (*Divine Names* 597b, 684b–c, where reception and transmission of divine commandments are direct knowledge

of the divine) and Plato, *Epist.* 8 (1092a), on the lifestyle of priests. At last, Pico has enumerated the main themes of Esdras.

330 "Bark," as in the outer layer of a tree, translates *cortex* ("bark," "husk," or "crust"). The term was used by mythographers and allegorists (e.g., Boccaccio's *Genealogiae deorum gentilium*) as a synonym for the rather more common Neoplatonic terms *integumentum* and *involucrum* (see §262) to refer to the literal meaning that covers or protects the deeper meaning of a text. See *Conclusiones* 2.11.63; *Expositiones in psalmos* 11.4.

331 Cf. *Heptaplus*, proem 8–10.

332 Matthew 7:6: "Give not that which is holy to dogs; neither cast ye your pearls before swine, lest perhaps they trample them under their feet, and turning upon you, they tear you." The language of election is also to be found elsewhere. According to Bausi (Pico 2003, 120), see *Epistle to Barbaro* §53; *Apologia* V (*Commentationes*, fol. EE iiii r = *Opere complete* 7.18); *Heptaplus*, proem; *Commento* 3.11. See Pseudo-Dionysius, *Celestial Hierarchies* 145c, on initiation into sacred mysteries. The Latin *margaritae* ("pearls") is often repeated in other cabalistic works by Christian followers of Pico, who specifically use the term "margarite" in translation into Italian. See Camillo (1991, 49–50).

333 The state of perfection is the final stage in the tripartite path to mystical enlightenment. See §70 and also *Heptaplus* 7.

334 Pico refers here to the esoteric way of transmitting the true religion and accepts the idea that religion in its material garb is for the people, whereas the truest knowledge of God is meant only for the initiates. Paul provides the Christian biblical model of mystical experience with the two visionary episodes recorded: his conversion on the road to Damascus (Acts 9:22, 26; Gal. 1:15–16) and his celestial rapture (2 Cor. 12:1–10). Hence, Pico refers to him as one of the elect ("vas electionis," §69). See Bausi (Pico 2003, 120); 1 Cor 2:4–7; *Conclusiones* 2.11.8 (Farmer 1998, 522–23); *Heptaplus*, proem 10.

335 1 Corinthians 2:6–7: “Howbeit we speak wisdom among the perfect: yet not the wisdom of this world, neither of the princes of this world that come to nought; But we speak the wisdom of God in a mystery, a wisdom which is hidden, which God ordained before the world, unto our glory.” See also 1 Cor. 2:13 (“Which things also we speak, not in the learned words of human wisdom; but in the doctrine of the Spirit, comparing spiritual things with spiritual.”) and Rom. 1:17 (“For the justice of God is revealed therein, from faith unto faith, as it is written: The just man liveth by faith.”). See Origen’s *De principiis* 3.3. To communicate the mysteries only to the worthy is a recurrent topos from ancient times.

336 On Pythagoras’s quasi-divine nature, attributing to him miracles that recall those attributed to Jesus, see Iamblichus, *De vita Pythagorica* 28.146. The reference to Pythagoras as Hyperborean Apollo hints at prophecy, as Apollo was associated with oracles. In fact, Pico misquotes Iamblichus, who actually attributes to Pythagoras the authorship of a single work entitled *The Sacred Discourse*. See Diogenes Laertius 8.42; Pico, *Heptaplus*, proem (Pico 2003, 121).

337 This passage recalls the image of Jacob and the ladder (§§73–74). Moses instructs us to prepare for a heavenly vision through the study of philosophy (§102).

338 Since ancient times, it has been widely believed that there were two writing systems in Egypt: demotic, or the common sort, and the sacred writing, or hieroglyphs, known only to priests and scribes. For ancient sources, see Horapollo, *Hieroglyphica*; Diodorus Siculus, *Bibliotheca historica* 1.74, 3.4; Clement of Alexandria, *Stromata* 5.4.20. For fifteenth-century sources, see the translations by Lorenzo Valla and others of Horapollo (reintroduced to Italy in 1419 by Cristoforo Buondelmonti, who was certainly the source for Cyriac d’Ancona’s famous voyage to Egypt in 1435). See also Poggio Bracciolini’s edition of Ammianus Marcellinus. Others who discuss hieroglyphs are Leon Battista Alberti in *De re aedificatoria* and Francesco Colonna in *Hypnerotomachia Poliphili*. Cf. Pico’s *Heptaplus*, proem; *Conclusiones* 2.11.70f (Farmer 1998, 550–51);

Commento 3.11. See also Castelli (1979); Camillo (1991, 48); Plutarch, *De Iside et Osiride* 354c (Pico 2003, 121).

339 Plato, *Epist.* 2 (312d–e); Pico, *Heptaplus*, proem (Pico 2003, 121–22).

340 See *Conclusiones* 2.11.34 and 63. Bausi notes that this quotation is taken from a letter written by Aristotle to Alexander the Great and translated into Latin by Gellius (20.5). The topic of the letter is devoted to books transmitted through oral wisdom. Pico thought that Aristotle transmitted his metaphysical philosophy through oral teaching (Pico 2003, 122).

341 See §83 and, on the transmission of Scripture from Moses to Jesus, Origen (*De principiis* 4.1–6; *Contra Celsum* 6.6; *Comm. in Matth.* 14.630). See also *Commento* 3.2, a passage that mentions the teachings transmitted by Jesus to His disciples through mysteries. Disciples did not write down these teachings; rather, they transmitted them orally only to the elect. For a recent perspective on this matter, see the introduction in Pesce (2004).

342 See *Conclusiones* 2.11.34 and Dionysius's *Celestial Hierarchies* 376c. Compare *Commento* 3.11; *Heptaplus*, proem (Pico 2003, 123).

343 The Greek text inserted here is the same as has been provided in all modern editions of the *Oration*. Bausi, however, argues quite convincingly for the interpolation of a longer quotation from Pseudo-Dionysius, which reads: "ἐκ νοὸς εἰς νοῦν, διὰ μέσου λόγου, σωματικοῦ μὲν ἀυλοτέρου δὲ ὅμως, γραφῆς ἐκτὸς" ("from mind to mind, […] through the means of verbal expression and thus corporeal, but at the same time more immaterial since it is free from writing," Pseudo-Dionysius 1987). Bausi bases this conjecture in part on the fact that the phrase *sine litteris* ("without writing") seems to have been taken from γραφῆς ἐκτὸς ("free from writing"), which belongs to this lengthier citation (Pico 2003, 165).

344 See §101. The link established between the intercession of the veil that protects the human mind from the heavenly glories and that of the word

("intercedente verbo") that transmits them in a manner intelligible to the intellect illustrates the difference between *epopteia* and *receptio*. See *Ecclesiastical Hierarchies* 1.4 (*PG* 3.367c) and Bausi (Pico 2003, 123).

345 Most contemporary scholars concur with Reuchlin, who attributed to Pico the initial use of this term in a Latin work on the subject (*De arte cabalistica* 1.13p–q). Within erudite Jewish circles, the systematic study of the Cabala in a philosophical vein corresponded exactly with the development of humanism in Italy. See Garin (1996) and cf. *Heptaplus* 1, 7; *Conclusiones* 2.11.72 (Farmer 1998, 552–53).

346 Cf. Reuchlin, *De arte cabalistica* 2.24d.132: "Kabbalah means 'a receiving.'" More interesting still is the earlier account provided in *De arte cabalistica* 2.6e.61: "Thus, in the ancient writings: 'Moshe kibbel' – 'Moses heard', and received the law at Sinai. So Kabbalah gets its name: receiving what is heard." "Moshe qibbel" is the beginning of Mishna *Avot* 1.1 (see Albeck 1988), where it is written that Moshe received the Torah on Mount Sinai and that the Torah was then transmitted to other sages in Israel. Cf. *Commento*, incipit to the final stanza.

347 Cyrus II the Great, founder of the Persian Empire (reigned 559–530 BC). On the conquest of Babylon in 539 BC, see Isa. 44:28–45:1 and 45:13 (the latter also for Cyrus as a liberator and messiah). It is Ezra who attributes to Cyrus the decree to rebuild the Temple (Ezra 6:3).

348 This is a reference to the "Babylonian exile" under Nebuchadnezzar (reigned 605–562 BC), who exiled the Jewish leadership from the city in 597–596 BC and 587–586 BC (1 Ezra 1:1–11). See Soggin et al. (2002, 300–31) and Liverani (2003, 203–20). Accounts of the exile are found in several biblical texts (2 Kings, 2 Chronicles, Daniel, Jeremiah). The prophet Ezekiel lived among the exiles, and it is he who preached to the Jews a restoration in the near future. See *Heptaplus* 7.

349 Zerubbabel, the grandson of the exiled king of Judah (1 Chron. 3:17–19), returned to Jerusalem with the first group of Jews. Upon returning from

exile, Zerubbabel became governor of the province of Judah under the Persian ruler Darius I (522–486 BC). He and the high priest Joshua restored the Temple (520–515 BC); however, Zerubbabel is not mentioned in the account of the dedication provided in Ezra 6:16–18. Another messianic figure (according to Ezra 2:2), Zerubbabel was a descendant of David, thus figuring in the genealogies of Jesus in Matthew 1 and Luke 3.

350 Ezra 1–6 gives the account of the restoration of the Temple, which was the centre of Jewish spiritual life until the final destruction of the Second Temple in 70 AD. From Ezra 7–10 comes the account of the return of a group of Jews to Judah under Artaxerxes (465–424 BC), who had permitted Ezra to reestablish the Torah with the help of priests (*kohanim*) and Levites.

351 Cf. *Conclusiones* 1.28.45 (Farmer 1998, 362–63).

352 2 Esdras; the archangel Uriel appears in a vision to Esdras, who transcribes the angelic revelations in seventy books. 2 Esdras, which is a Jewish apocalypse, appeared in the Vulgate. It is written that scribes worked forty days in order to write down the hidden oral tradition from the seventy sages, who correspond to the number of the seventy members of the Sanhedrin. 2 Esdras 14:21–24 records that only Esdras's accounts were written down; cf. *Heptaplus*, proem 2. See Bausi (Pico 2003, 125). The seventy sages of the Sanhedrin are mentioned in Hilarius, *Tractatus in psalmos*.

353 In the New Testament, the term often designates the council of priests and scribes that opposes Jesus and His followers (Matt. 26:59; Mark 14:55, 15:1; Luke 22:66; John 11:47; Acts 4:15, 5:21, 6:12, 22:30, 23:1, 24:20). Sanhedrin derives from the Greek συνέδριον (*synedrion*), denoting an assembly of leaders. In the New Testament, Josephus Flavius, and rabbinical literature, various institutions are described with this same name in various historical periods. Different theories exist regarding exactly what it was and how it functioned. See, for example, Hoenig (1953).

354 4 Esd. 14:45–48; cf. *Heptaplus* 1.

355 Cf. *Conclusiones* 2.11.1–3 (Farmer 1998, 518–21).

356 These books are thoroughly messianic; there is even an early interpolation at the very beginning of 2 Esdras naming Jesus as the Messiah. Furthermore, the seventh and final vision that Esdras has under visitation of the angel Uriel explicitly states that Esdras composed seventy books of esoteric revelations. It is interesting to note that one of the characters in the canonical Book of Ezra is probably the namesake of Mithridates. Another possible source for the association of the Cabala to the figure of Ezra lies in the works of Abraham ibn Ezra.

357 The three archangels Pico mentions in §135 represent dialectics, natural philosophy, and theology. It is at this point in the first redaction of the oration that Pico underwent what Tognon refers to as an “intellectual conversion” (in Pico 1987, 65n16) to the Cabala. Cf. *Heptaplus* 3 and 5.

358 Pope Sixtus IV was a renowned bibliophile. A fresco painted by Melozzo da Forlì (*Hospital of Santo Spirito*, 1478) depicts the pope appointing the humanist Bartolomeo Sacchi (Platina) as Librarian of the Vatican. Regarding his complex relationships with Jews and Judaism, one must of course remember that it was Sixtus IV who authorized the establishment of the Inquisition in Spain in 1478. The initiative’s primary function was to adjudicate on matters of faith concerning the *conversos*, or converted Jews.

359 Giambattista Cibò (Innocent VIII, pope 1484–92). It is the same Dominican-led tribunal set up by Sixtus IV that will pursue Pico under Innocent VIII. See Reuchlin’s account of Pico’s escape to France and pursuit by the Inquisition in *De arte* cabalistica 1.13q.

360 It is not certain which books Sixtus IV wanted to be translated into Latin. The author of the translations was likely Flavius Mithridates. See Bausi (Pico 2003, 126–27) and also Onofri (1986, 69–70); Cicognani’s commentary to Pico (1941, 124–32); Wirszubski’s introduction to Flavius Mithridates (1963, 66–69); Piemontese (1996, 261–62).

361 Cf. *Heptaplus* 3.

362 We cannot be sure which books these are.

363 Pico died in 1494, at only thirty-two years of age. See Pico, *Apologia* V (*Commentationes*, fol. EE v *v* = *Opere complete*, VII 25); *Heptaplus cabalistica* proem.

364 Reuchlin, *De arte*, 1.13s–t.91: “Nor can I boast with Mirandola of having, like Ezra who once ordered the seventy to write out volumes on the secrets of the Kabbalah, spent vast sums collecting books.” Four of these books are at the Vatican Library (Vat. Hebr. 189, 190, 191; Vat. Chigi A. 6.190). See Tamani (1997, 516–18) and Busi’s and Campanini’s introductions to Mithridates (2004) and Mithridates (2005), respectively. See also Wirszubski’s introduction to Mithridates (1963, 50–63); Lelli (1994, 206–10).

365 Cf. *Commento* 3.11. Pico writes about his desire to know the cabalistic tradition and the need to study Hebrew and Aramaic, without which it is impossible to obtain a grasp of the Cabala. See also Pico, *Apologia* V (*Commentationes*, fol. EE v *r* = *Opere complete*, VII 22) (Pico 2003, 128). On the Latin translation of these books, see Tamani (1997, 516–18). It is likely that the translations made by Flavius Mithridates for Pico are different from those made for Sixtus IV (Pico 2003, 129). See *Heptaplus*, proem 2.

366 The doctrine of the Trinity is not explicitly mentioned in the New Testament but was elaborated in later writings. However, certain passages provided the material on which it was formulated. See Matt. 28:19: “in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit”; 2 Cor. 13:13: “the grace of Jesus, the love of God and the communion of the Holy Spirit.” See also *Conclusiones* 1.28.19 (Farmer 1998, 352–53) as well as 2.11.5–7, 20, 30, 33–34, and 45; cf. *Heptaplus* 5–6.

367 See 1 Cor. 8:6; Phil. 2:6; Col. 1:16, where Paul affirms the existence of Christ before Creation. See *Conclusiones* 2.11.14–16 (Farmer 1998, 526–27); cf. *Conclusiones* 2.11.43 (Farmer 1998, 538–39).

368 *Conclusiones* 2.11.32 (Farmer 1998, 532–33), 2.11.38–39 (Farmer 1998, 536–37), 2.11.46 (Farmer 1998, 538–39), 2.11.51 (Farmer 1998, 540–41); *Heptaplus* 6–7.

369 Cf. *Conclusiones* 1.28.4–5 (Farmer 1998, 346–47).

370 Cf. *Conclusiones* 2.11.19, 21–26, and 40 (Farmer 1998, 528–31, 536–37).

371 *Conclusiones* 1.28.10 (Farmer 1998, 350–51) and *Heptaplus* 7.

372 Purgatory and Hell are not mentioned in the biblical texts but are developed in later Christian writings.

373 Jerome was commissioned by Pope Damasus in 382 to provide a faithful Latin translation of the Bible. It took twenty years to complete, largely because Jerome took the unprecedented step of translating the Old Testament directly from original sources rather than the Greek Septuagint. His translation became the accepted text and was thenceforth called the *versio vulgata* or “common translation” (Vulgate). Pico plays on this terminology in his distinction between the common understanding of the Mosaic texts and the secret cabalistic interpretation known only to the elect. See Pico, *Conclusiones Cabalisticae* 2.11.72. According to Bausi, this idea drives all the seventy-two theses on the Cabala. In his *Commento* (3.2), Pico claims that the Cabala is the “greatest source of our Faith.” See Bausi (Pico 2003, 129).

374 Cf. *Heptaplus*, proem 2.

375 Augustine, *Confessiones* 7.9.13.

376 Cf. *Heptaplus* 7.

377 Antonio Vinciguerra (1440/46–1502), secretary of the Venetian Republic, is listed in the *Apologia* as a contemporary practitioner of magic (Pico 2003, 130). On Antonio Vinciguerra, see Della Torre (1902); Beffa (1975); Bacchelli (2001, 64n184).

378 On Dactylus, see Widmanstetter (1555, cc. axx2v–3r). See also Scholem (1979, 20–22, 40). Dactylus is probably to be identified with the Vitalis Dactylomelos who, in January 1500, completed the translation of Averroes's *Commentary on Aristotle's Physics*, contained in the Latin codex 6507 of the National Library in Paris. See Bacchelli (2001, 65n185). Cassuto (1918, 317–19) argues that Dactylus was one of Pico's Hebrew teachers.

379 *Conclusiones* 2.11.17 (Farmer 1998, 526–27).

380 "Ancient wisdom" translates *prisca sapientia*.

381 See Iamblichus, *De vita Pytagorica* 28.145; Diogenes Laertius 8.1.8; *Conclusiones* 2.11.10 (Farmer 1998, 524–25). See also Reuchlin, *De arte cabalistica*: "His philosophy, however, I have only been able to glean from the Hebrew Kabbalah, since it derives in origin from the teachers of Kabbalah, and then was lost to our ancestors, disappearing from Southern Italy into the Kabbalistic writings." This would become the widespread interpretation throughout the sixteenth century.

382 *Conclusiones* 2.11.55 (Farmer 1998, 542–43); cf. *Heptaplus*, proem.

383 Reuchlin, *De arte cabalistica* 147. The association between Orpheus and Pythagoras is already present in Herodotus 2.81.

384 Cf. Gellius (1990, *Noctes Atticae* 12.6.1).

385 Cf. §233.

386 See Reuchlin, *De arte cabalistica* 3.52f: "[T]he subject is quite complicated and not understood by outsiders as yet, and scholars in the Latin world in particular know nothing at all about it, except the little work published some time ago by Count Giovanni Pico della Mirandola and Paul Ricci, and even in the present day that little work is insufficiently understood." He goes on to complain of slanderers (*calumniatores*), whom he compares to Pharisees.

Part III Images

Legi patres colendissimi in Arabum monumentis Abdalam
prophetam Sarracenorum, cum eum rogarent eius discipuli,
quid haberet in ista mundana machina summe admirandum,
maxime spectandum [illegible] nihil homine admirabilius respon-
disse. Cui sententiae illud Mercurii adstipulatur. Magnum
o Asclepi, miraculum est homo. Horum dictorum ratio-
nem cogitanti mihi non satis illa faciebant, quae multa
de humanae naturae praestantia afferuntur a multis, esse
hominem creaturarum internuntium, superis familiarem, regem
inferiorum, sensuum perspicacia, rationis indagine, intelli-
gentiae lumine naturae interpretem, stabilis aevi et fluxi
temporis interstitium, et quod Persae dicunt mundi copulam,
immo hymenaeum, ab angelis, teste Davide, paulo deminu-
tum. Magna haec quidem, sed non principalia, id est quae
summae admirationis privilegium sibi vindicent.
Cur enim non ipsos angelos et beatissimos caeli choros ma-
gis admiremur? Tandem intellexisse mihi sum visus

Figure 1. Florence, Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale, ms. Palatino 885, f. 143r.

[evadet] et celeste animal. Si intellectualia, angelus
erit et dei filius. Et si nulla creaturarum sorte contentus
in unitatis centrum suae se receperit, unus cum deo spiritus
factus in solitaria patris caligine qui est super omnia constitutus
omnibus antestabit. Quis hunc nostrum chameleonta
non admiretur? aut omnino quis aliud admiretur
magis? Quem non immerito Asclepius atheniensis
versipellis huius et se ipsam transformantis naturae argumento
per protheum in mysteriis significari dixit. Hinc illae
apud hebreos et pythagoricos metamorphoses celebratae.
Nam et hebreorum theologia secretior nunc Enoch
sanctum in angelum divinitatis quem vocant [illegible]
nunc in alia alios numina reformant. Et pythago-
rici scelestos homines in bruta deformant et si
Empedocli creditur, etiam in plantas. Quos imitatus
Maumeth illud frequens habebat in ore: qui a divina
lege recesserit bestia evadit. Et merito quidem. Neque enim plantam
cortex sed stupida et nihil sentiens natura, nec iumentum

Figure 2. Florence, Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale, ms. Palatino 885, f. 145r.

adverti[illegible] h[illegible] illud chaldeum: [illegible]
[illegible]
[illegible] homo vanit[atis]
ac multi[illegible] et desolationis nostre animal. hoc
igitur [illegible] nari, hoc [illegible] n[ost]ra ut id [illegible]
si volumus [illegible] [illegible] potissimum debemus. Curare
ut nos illud [illegible] dicamus [illegible] honore [illegible] n[ost]ro
[illegible] [illegible] factos [illegible] et iumentis insipientib[us].
Sed illud potius [illegible] propheta dii estis et filii excelsi
omnes. Ut ab[illegible] dulcissima p[ro]p[ter] liberalitate
qua dedit ille [illegible] optionem et salvavit nos. Etiam
[illegible] nobis [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] et in
nomina ambitio ut [illegible] n[ost]ra [illegible] anhelemus
ad summa: atque illa [illegible] si volumus [illegible]
[illegible]. [illegible] [illegible] gloria [illegible]
[illegible] et quicquid mundi [illegible] denique posthabemus ultra
mundana [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] [illegible]
advolemus. Ibi ut [illegible] mysteria [illegible]

Figure 3. Florence, Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale, ms. Palatino 885, f. 147r.

+ te iungat. (Indica [illegible] nobis aquas hauriamus: nomen
enim ab aquilone [illegible] quod rectum denotat. Ei
qui ab occasu: [illegible] quod expiationem significat.
Ei qui ab oriente: [illegible] quod lumen ;
nat. Ei qui a meridie: [illegible]: quod nos perfec-
tionem comparari possimus. Admovete animum diligenter
considerate patres quid hec sibi velint Zoroastris oracula
profecto nihil aliud nisi ut morali scientia quasi undis hibe-
ricis oculorum sordes expiemus: dialectica quasi boreali
amussi illorum aciem lineemus ad rectum: tum in naturali
contemplatione debile adhuc veritatis lumen quasi nascen-
tis solis incunabula pati assuescamus ut tandem per theo-
logicam pietatem et sanctissimum deorum cultum quasi cele-
stes aquile meridiani solis fulgidissimum iubar fortiter
perferamus. Hec illa forte a David decantata primum ab Au-
gustino explicata latius matutina, meridiana et
vespertina cognitio. Hec est illa lux meridialis que
seraphinos recte inflammat ad lineam et cherubinos

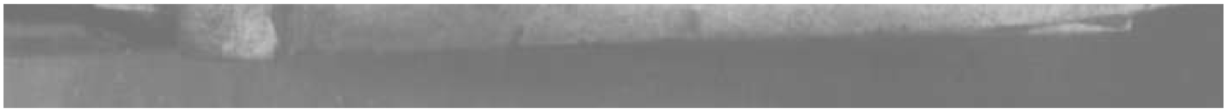

Figure 4. Florence, Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale, ms. Palatino 885, f. 151v.

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